PRABUDDHA BHARATA, JUNE 1985

EGOCENTRICITY: ITS CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

(EDITORIAL)

Selfishness and egoism

In last month's Editorial it was shown that selfishness is not a sign of love for oneself and that true love for oneself is complementary to love for others. What, then, is the root-cause of selfishness? How can one distinguish true love for oneself from self-love or selfishness?

It is indeed difficult to give a positive definition of selfishness, for selfishness does not always manifest itself in a positive way. We generally identify selfishness with self-interest. A selfish person is believed to be one who seeks only his own interest in life. However, if everyone were interested only in himself and minded his own business, there would have been less problems in the world. But it is commonly seen that many people are more interested in the vices of others than in their own virtues or are more interested in doing harm to others than in doing good to themselves.

In a memorable passage in his *Hundred Verses on Virtue* Bhartṛhari divides human beings into four groups. The first group consists of those very virtuous people (*satpuruşah*) who are always bent on doing good to others, sacrificing self-interest. To the second group belong the common people (*sāmānyāh*) who try to do good to others without giving up self-interest. They represent the concept 'enlightened self-interest' which forms the basis of the western ideal of business enterprise. Then there are those whom Bhartṛhari calls 'demonical people' (*mānuşa rākşasāh*) who do harm to others out of self-interest. These are the people who are usually stigmatized as 'selfish'. But Bhartṛhari goes further. He says there is a fourth class of people who try to destroy the welfare of others even though it is of no earthly benefit to themselves. 'I do not know what to call them', he says in despair.[1]

If one does harm to others out of self-interest, it is understandable. But why do people try to harm others, speak ill of others, or prevent others from going up even though they themselves stand to gain nothing from those misdeeds? Why do people indulge in actions inimical to the welfare of others in spite of being aware that those actions may bring harm to themselves sooner or later? Why do people consciously strive to get themselves 'hoist with their own petard'? Clearly, selfishness is not merely a positive interest in oneself; there are several other factors involved in it. As a matter of fact, selfishness is one of the manifestations of a more comprehensive phenomenon known as 'egoism'.

Egoism is generally understood as egotism (talking about oneself), conceit, pride, vanity, arrogance, etc. each term denoting a different way the ego manifests itself. At first sight selfishness might seem to be different from egoism, for selfish people do not always appear to be conceited or arrogant; they may appear to be quite humble. Nor do egoistic people always appear to be selfish; on the contrary, many of them are found to be generous and capable of spectacular acts of self-sacrifice. In fact, much of the good done in the world is done by egoistic people, though they often do an equal amount of harm also. This is well known, but it may be interesting to note the observation made on this point by Abraham Maslow, one of the chief exponents of the humanistic or 'Third Force' psychology which is gaining popularity in the West.

When Maslow was studying under the great U.S. social anthropologist Ruth Benedict, he visited a settlement of Northern Blackfoot Indians. There he witnessed the Sun Dance ceremony in which all the tepees of the society gathered in one huge circle. The 'rich men' of the society had brought all that they possessed: 'mounds of blankets, food, bundles of various sorts, and sometimes very pathetic things—cases of Pepsi-Cola'. As many possessions as a man could have accumulated during the

[1] {Sanskrit} Bhartṛhari, *Nītiśatakam,* 75.

previous year were piled up. Then the 'rich men' talked boastfully about their wealth and generosity and gave away everything they had to the 'poor'. Maslow describes the scene as follows:

> I am thinking of one man I saw. At one point in the ceremony, in the Plains' Indian tradition; he strutted, and, we would say, boasted, that is, told of his achievements. 'You all know that I have done so and so, you all know that I have done this and that, and you all know how smart I am, how good a stock-man I am, how good a farmers, and how I have therefore accumulated great wealth. And then, with a very lordly gesture, a gesture of great pride but without being humiliating, he gave this pile of wealth to the widows, to the orphaned children, and to the blind and the diseased. At the end of Sun Dance ceremony he was stripped of all his possessions, owning nothing but the clothes he stood in.[2]

The attitude of a philanthropist in the modern society differs little from the attitude of those Red Indians except that his culture compels him to be hypocritical and that he retains far, far more than he gives away. Maslow wanted to find out who was the richest man among those Indians. The white secretary of the reserve, a government official, looked into the records and mentioned Jimmy as the one who possessed the most stock, cattle and horses. But when Maslow asked the Indians, they pointed to their chief as the richest man, although he owned nothing. Everything he acquired he give away to the community, retaining only his ego as the chief. As for Jimmy and his horses, they were referred to only with contempt. In primitive society everybody is encouraged to be unselfish without having to sacrifice egoism.

On the contrary, the civilized society allows everyone to be selfish as much as possible but puts curbs on egoism. The chief concern of the civilized man is to grab as many objects of enjoyment as possible through polite means. The control of egoism is a major part of the processes of education and socialization. Uncontrolled or unsublimated egoism is one of the chief causes of conflict in social life. Egoism obscures clear thinking, and whatever decision is taken under its influence usually turns out to be wrong. One of the first casualties in the exercise of egoism is friendship. Nobody seeks the company of an egoistic person. In the *Mahābhārata* Yakṣa asks Yudhiṣṭhira: 'Who is loved by all?', and the answer given is: 'One who is free from pride'.[3]

Both selfishness and egoism have a common base, namely, an overstressed sense of individuality and an anxious need to protect or assert it. A general term for this tendency is 'ego-centricity' which covers both selfishness and egoism. It is necessary to understand how this base of egoism gets overstressed and why people feel the need to protect or assert it.

Two types of egoism

Before proceeding further it is necessary to point out that there are two types of egoism: 'soft skin' and 'hard shell'. The soft-skin variety is found in people who are sensitive and touchy and are usually introverts. They appear to be humble but have in reality a repressed sense of superiority. They harbour feelings of resentment but would prefer to brood over it, often blaming and suffering themselves. They can forbear but cannot forgive. People whom psychologists characterize as masochistic and 'schizo' (schizophrenic) are extreme cases of soft-skin egoism.

The 'hard-shell' variety is found in people who are aggressive and extroverted and can take on a good amount of criticism with apparent nonchalance. They do not allow themselves to suffer but would rather 'take it out on' somebody else. They put on superior airs but beneath it all lies a repressed sense of inferiority. They find it difficult to forbear but are often willing to forgive. People whom psychologists characterize as sadistic and 'para' (paranoid) are extreme cases of hard-shell egoism.

Both the groups display varying degrees of selfishness, though the former, owing to their introverted nature, are popularly and unjustly regarded as more selfish.

Causes of egoism and selfishness

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[2] Abraham H. Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (New York: Penguin Book; 1982) p. 195.

[3] The original question and answer, framed in a slightly different way, are:
{Sanskrit} *Mahābhārata,* Vanaparvan, 313.75, 76.

No man acts without a cause. There are at least four main causes which prompt people to behave selfishly or egoistically.

1. *Struggle for existence*. As Darwin showed, there is in all living beings a natural biological urge to struggle for their existence. In animals this struggle is restricted to the physical plane. In human beings social life and advancements in agriculture and technology have to a great extent made physical struggle for existence unnecessary. But the original instinct has not been eliminated; it has only been pushed from the physical plane to the mental plane, where it manifests itself as the urge to compete. In modern society person's worth is judged not by what he is, but by what he has. Therefore people compete with one another in order to possess more and thereby establish their worth. In this competition egoism and selfishness have survival value. A naive simpleton is spoofed everywhere. Those who have read Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield* may remember how the boy Moses, sent to the market to sell an old horse, returned with a sack of coloured pieces of glass. Modern society makes people believe that without being selfish and egoistic it is not possible to succeed in life or prevent others from taking undue advantage of their alleged goodness of heart.

2. *Insecurity*. Another cause of selfish and egoistic behaviour is the feeling of insecurity produced by alienation from collective life. The famous Swiss child psychologist Piaget has shown that 'during the early stages the world and the self are one; neither term is distinguished from the other'. The newborn baby has hardly any ego; its self remains embedded in the collective unconscious and so it feels secure. As the child grows, its ego gradually gets separated and takes shape. If there is adequate parental and social support, it remains well integrated with collective life and continues to feel secure. But if this early support is withdrawn owing to parental neglect, quarrel between the parents or adverse social conditions, the child gets alienated from collective life. It then feels insecure and may take recourse to selfishness and egotism as a means of self-defence. However, what was originally intended to serve as a defence strategy often changes into a mechanism for aggression and self-aggrandizement.

Ruth Benedict has shown that aggressive behaviour is clearly linked to the pattern of social life an individual grows in. She divided communities into two groups under the terms 'high synergy' and 'low 'synergy'. In a high-synergy society the members live for one another and work in a spirit of co-operation as if they constituted one single organism. In a low-synergy society this integration is very little in evidence. From her extensive study of American-Indian communities she came to the following conclusion:

> Is there any sociological condition which correlates with strong aggression and any that correlates with low aggression? ….From all comparative material, the conclusion that emerges is that societies where non-aggression is conspicuous have social orders in which the individual by the same act and at the same time serves his own advantage and that of the group... Non-aggression occurs (in these societies) not because people are unselfish and put social obligations above personal desires, but when social arrangements make these two identical. [By contrast, aggression is found in] cultures with low synergy where the social structure provides for acts which are mutually opposed and counteractive (and)...where the advantage of one individual becomes a victory over another, and the majority who are not victorious must shift as they can.[4]

3. *Immaturity*. Unfavourable external conditions alone cannot, however, explain fully egocentric behaviour. For, as Abraham Maslow mentions, even in the 'high-synergy' community of Black Foot Indians there are people like Jimmy owning a great number of livestock. Selfish and arrogant people are found even in highly cultured and well-knit families. Egocentricity is essentially a personal defect. It betrays a person's inability to manage himself properly and is therefore a sign of immaturity. It is commonly found to be used as a shield for defence against oneself rather than against other people. An egocentric individual is preoccupied with himself because of his fear of his emotions and drives which threaten to overpower him. In this respect he is not much different from the escapist who is always preoccupied with *other* people and things in order to forget his own worries. Egoism and escapism represent two wrong ways of dealing with oneself.

4. *Ignorance*. Inability to deal with oneself properly is to a great extent caused by ignorance about one's true nature and about the dynamics of the mind. It is a surprising thing that egocentric

[4] Quoted in *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, p. 194.

preoccupation with oneself does not produce true knowledge about oneself. Egoistic and selfish persons are the ones who have the least knowledge of themselves. There are two reasons for this. One is that their present knowledge of themselves is based on a wrong identity. Instead of identifying themselves with their true Self (known as Ātman) they identify themselves with a false self. All the brooding on oneself only strengthens this wrong identity. Secondly, normal thinking in most people is dominated by the unconscious. It follows certain instinctive patterns, is unfree and impure, and is therefore incapable of revealing the true Self.

Wrong self-identity gives rise to certain wrong beliefs which serve as the fundamental premises of all wrong behaviour. Three of these premises play a dominant role in egoistic behaviour.[5]

Three premises of egocentric behaviour

The first premise is that a person's identity and worth stand in need of proof. The primary basis of egocentric behaviour is an acute awareness of deficiency inferiority in the person. This produces a compelling (although unconscious) urge to establish one's identity and worth. An egocentric person has a low opinion about himself, bordering on self-contempt. The observations or Prof. Stark and Prof. Washburn on this point are worth quoting here.

> Pride need not be a bad thing—for example when it takes the form of quiet and unconditional self-affirmation. But this is not the pride of the egocentric, which is neither quiet nor without condition. The egocentric feels affirmed only on the condition that he succeeds and then, rather than remaining quietly content, he needs to extend the scope and significance of the victory, either by seeking the admiration of others or, at least, by engaging in private congratulations.
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> The satisfaction that the egocentric experiences during victories is most often fleeting and shaky. Since no number of victories is sufficient to establish a sense of worth that is final or absolute, feelings of uncertainty occur even at times of triumph. Past and present victories are never completely convincing.
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> It may sound paradoxical to say that a person who hates himself is egocentric, as it is more common to think of egocentricity in terms of vanity and pride. Nevertheless, the self-contempt is at least as much a part of the egocentric system as pride because, like pride, it rests upon the premise that identity and worth stand in need of proof...
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> Self-contempt must be distinguished from humility which has nothing to do with self-denigration or feelings of worthlessness.. Genuine humility is really the same as genuine (non egocentric) pride; both reflect quiet and unconditional self-affirmation. The truly humble individual so accepts himself that he feels no need to prove anything. As such, humility reflects a way of being in the world that lies outside the egocentric framework altogether.[6]

The second premise of egocentricity holds that identity and worth are established by winning the recognition and approval of other people. This premise gets incorporated into our belief-system in childhood. The child finds that good behaviour is rewarded with a candy or a pat, whereas bad behaviour invites a spanking or scolding. This reward-punishment system may have its practical benefits but its disadvantages are equally great. For instance, in a cultural centre for boys run by one of our institutions it was found that the boy who won the 'Best boy of the year' award almost invariably turned out to be the worst boy the very next year, so much so that the authorities had to discontinue the custom of giving that award. It was the egoistic desire to win the award that had produced the good behaviour and, once that desire was fulfilled, the good behaviour disappeared leaving behind the original ego now boosted by the award. In the Montessori method of education every child in the school or group is awarded some prize or gift.

Early experiences of this kind lead to the development of two attitudes or tendencies in the adult. One of these is the tendency to judge oneself by the opinions and attitudes of others. 'This can lead to a situation in which a person becomes his own most severe critic', say Stark and Washburn. 'For example, there are many people who function adequately and are well liked, but who nonetheless suffer

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[5] For an insightful discussion on this subject see, Michael J. Stark and Michael C. Washburn, 'Ego, egocentricity and self-transcendence: western interpretation of eastern teaching', in *Philosophy East and West* (University of Hawaii) July, 1977.

[6] *ibid.*, pp. 274-75.

from self-condemnation because they perceive themselves as failing to live up to their (internalized) conditions of sell-approval.'[7]

The other tendency is to feel always the need for other people's approval. Held within reasonable limits, this tendency regulates an individual's life in conformity with the norms and customs of the society. Many people in the due course learn to develop their own internal self-evaluation system based on self-knowledge and, with its help, lead a peaceful and socially useful life unaffected by vicissitudes. But in the egocentric individual, egoism distorts his perspectives and his need for other people's approval goes beyond normal limits. He finds himself struggling to attain an impossible goal. For it is not possible to get the approval of everybody nor to get the approval of even a few at all times. Worse still, the egoistic individual expects everyone to seek his approval for, since his own ego needs to be constantly bolstered up by the admiration and support of other people, he cannot believe that people can live without him by deriving their strength and inspiration from their own inner resources.

The third premise maintains that happiness and fulfilment belong to the person who succeeds in establishing his identity and worth before other people. What this implies is that the happiest persons are those who are admired and approved of most. This is of course a false premise as is evident from the fact that film stars, sportsmen and dashing local-leaders, who are wildly admired, are seldom found to live happy lives, especially after they have passed the 'peak'. But modern society perpetuates this illusion through what Eric Fromm calls the 'marketing orientation'. In earlier times people went to the market to sell or buy commodities: rice, vegetables, cattle, clothes etc. But in modern times people themselves have become commodities. They sell their knowledge, their music, their talents, their beauty, and those who earn more money by this means are considered to be more successful and happy. Says Eric Fromm

> Since modern man experiences himself both as the seller and as the commodity to be sold on the market, his self-esteem depends on conditions beyond his control. If he is 'successful', he is valuable; if he is not he is worthless. The degree of insecurity which results from this orientation can hardly be overestimated. If one feels that one's own value is not constituted primarily by the human qualities one possesses, but by one's success on a competitive market with ever changing conditions, one's self-esteem is bound to be shake and in constant need of confirmation by others. Hence one is driven to strive relentlessly for success and any setback is a severe threat to one's self-esteem; helplessness, insecurity and inferiority feelings are the result.[8]

Consequences of egocentricity

There is no need to attempt to punish a selfish or egoistic person, for egocentricity itself is its own punishment. There is none more miserable than the egocentric. What he misses most is peace. Peace depends upon two things: fulfilment and security. Fulfilment is an inner condition, the result of Self-realization. This eludes the selfish individual because he seeks fulfilment by hoarding external objects; it eludes the egoistic individual because he seeks fulfilment in the approval and admiration of other people.

We have seen that insecurity is one of the causes of egoism; paradoxically, it is also one of the effects or consequences of egoism. Egoism isolates the individual from common life and this produces insecurity. Insecurity, is most commonly experienced in the form of anxiety. Paul Tillich has shown in his famous book *Courage To Be* that this existential anxiety is to be distinguished from fear. Fear always has an object, it is a response to a specific threat or danger. Anxiety has seldom a definite object; it is a vague feeling of precariousness, an uneasy attitude towards life in general. Fear vanishes as soon as the object of fear is removed. But anxiety persists always and, even when there are no threats in evidence, the mere fantasy of defeat or loss is sufficient to generate uneasiness. However, unlike the neurotic who seeks psychiatric help, the egocentric may not be aware of the anxiety that is constantly gnawing at his heart, except in certain critical situations or when gastric ulcer, high blood-pressure and

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[7] *ibid.*, pp. 268.

[8] Eric Fromm, *Man For Himself* (NewYork: Fawcett Premier Books, 1975) p. 79.

other psychosomatic troubles appear. Even if he becomes aware of his anxiety, his attempts to remove it will not succeed as its roots—selfishness and egoism—remain strong in him.

The second thing that the egocentric individual loses is spontaneity, Anyone who has attempted to do something creative knows egoism blocks creativity. One's best creation, be it music, painting. dance, scientific research or a short story or poem, emerges only when one remains free from egoism at least temporarily. A chronically egoistic or selfish person is rarely able to 'let go' and allow his entire being to respond to the creative impulse. Nor can he be spontaneous in his relationships. He wants to be loved, but he cannot love because love is self-giving, and the last thing that the egocentric wishes to give is himself. Egocentricity is the rock that breaks marriages and friendship.

When there is no spontaneity, life becomes repetitive and dull. An egocentric person can take up only those actions that will satisfy his vanity or selfishness. As a result, many of his emotions, talents and potentialities remain unrepresented in action or manifest themselves only in distorted form. His being shrinks in size as the realm of possibilities contracts. Furthermore egoism and selfishness prevent people from adapting themselves to changing conditions and difficult situations. The egocentric individual thus finds himself in a limited world, full of tension and constantly fighting real and imaginary foes.

Egoism and the ego

Our purpose in discussing egocentricity is not to hold a certain class of people up to redicule. Selfishness and egoism are present in almost all human beings in varying degrees. Egocentricity is a fundamental existential problem and, without coming into grips with it, it is not possible to solve the basic problems of life. Egoism is the root cause of all suffering and bondage.

It may be possible to attain success (in the sense of acquiring wealth and fame) in worldly life by being selfish or egoistic or both, but never in spiritual life. Egocentricity is the greatest obstacle to spiritual progress and, as long as it persists, Self-realization or God realization is not possible. In all religions selfishness and egoism are regarded as major sins or bonds preventing the soul from attaining salvation or liberation. All religions aim at the transformation of ego-centred life into God-centred life. Śrī Rāmakrishna identified Māyā with egoism. He used to say:

> Māyā is nothing but the egotism of the embodied soul. This egotism has covered everything like a veil. 'All troubles come to an end when the ego dies.' ...This Māyā, that is to say, the ego, is like a cloud. The sun cannot be seen on account of a thin patch of cloud; when that disappears one sees the sun. If by the grace of the guru one's ego vanishes, then one sees God.
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> Rāma, who is God himself, was only two and a half cubits ahead of Lakshmana. But Lakshmana couldn't see Him because Sītā stood between them. Lakshmana may be compared to the jīva, and Sītā to Māyā. Man cannot see God on account of the barrier of Māyā.
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> Just look I am creating a barrier in front of my face with this towel. Now you can't see me, even though I am so near. Likewise, God is the nearest of all, but we cannot see Him on account of this covering of Māyā.[9]

Nowadays there is a good deal of talk about selflessness, 'de-egoizing', transcendence, and so on. An advice frequently given is, 'Enjoy the world but give up the ego'. The ego, built up through years of social interaction, cannot be so easily given up, nor is this the immediate need. The primary need is to recover one's true identity and worth. The ego in most people is immature and ignorant; it should, first of all, be helped to attain maturity and to develop its powers fully. Furthermore, the ego, which itself is a false self, puts on several masks and these are to be removed. All this cannot be done in a day, nor through ordinary thinking and reading. Just as the real nature of a machine can be studied only when it is working, so also the real nature of the ego can be known only through interpersonal dealings. A disciplined way of doing this is Karma-Yoga. Through Karma-Yoga the ego attains maturity, develops its powers to the fullest extent and recovers its true identity and worth. Only a strong, pure, mature ego can transcend itself.

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[9] *The Gospel of Sri Rāmakrishna* (Madras: Sri Rāmakrishna Math, 1974) p. 101.

One important point to be kept in mind in the context is the difference between egoism and the ego. Egoism is the gross, usually misdirected, outer manifestation of a subtle psychic principle known as the ego. Most people are so much entangled in the gross forms of egoism that they are not in a position to understand what the ego really is. The question of transcending the ego does not even arise in such a situation. There is a temporary suspension of egoism and dissolution of the ego spontaneously taking place during deep sleep (*suṣupti*), but this is not transcendence. The ego is transcended only when the luminous Ātman emerges to the surface, and this takes place only at the higher levels of spiritual experience.

Before attempting to transcend the ego it is necessary to understand and practise some important psycho-spiritual processes like the integration of the ego, its maturation and transformation. This topic will be discussed further in the next month's Editorial. Meanwhile, we may conclude our present discussion with a small poem composed by Sister Devamātā (a disciple of Swami Paramānanda) in which she has expressed the realistic attitude of a non-egoistic person.

> I am nor greater nor less by judgement of men,
> Neither better nor worse by human decree.
> Mightier hands hold the balancing scales
> That determine my lack or my merit.
> I am what I am
> By Divine weight and measure.[10]

[10] Sister Devamata, *The Habit of Happiness* (La Crescenta: Ananda Ashrama, 1930) p. 12.

PRABUDDHA BHARATA, JULY 1985

EGO-AWAKENING

(EDITORIAL)

Encountering oneself

There is a well-known Sufi story about the Muslim divine Nasrudin:

> A man saw Nasrudin searching for something on the ground,
> 'What have you lost, Mulla?' he asked.
> 'My key', said the Mulla.
> So the man went down on his knee too, and they both looked for it. After a time, the other man asked, 'Where ctually did you drop it?'
> 'In my own house.'
> 'Then why are you looking here?'
> 'There is more light here than inside my ownhouse.'[1]

Once in a while everyone loses something or other—a key, a pen, an important paper or umbrella. This usually happens owing to the person's negligence or absent-mindedness. Apart from these things, if you are a reflective person, you are likely to feel deep within you a sense of personal loss, an existential want. This is caused by the awareness that you have lost yourself! Your self-identity has been lost in the allowing themselves to be driven by their own instincts, emotions and desires, and by looking upon themselves and their talents and capacities as saleable commodities, many people have reduced themselves to the level of objects with no subjective value or meaning. Not only that; they usually seek their lost self-identity in the wrong place—in the more familiar external world, in their parents, friends, film stars, fictitious characters in novels or fantasized self-images whom they follow, imitate or identify themselves with.

A few people, perhaps after struggling for years to acquire wealth, power, fame and love, realize during some moments of clear awareness, or when confronted with an acute crisis, that all their struggle has brought them neither fulfilment nor peace but only suffering and bondage. Then they ask themselves, 'What have I gained from all my struggles? Is what I have gained worth all the suffering that I have undergone for it? What have I made of my life?' In other words, they awaken to themselves. Such an awakening came to Ratnākara, the robber. One day a sage came his way and Ratnākara asked him on pain of death to deliver up his possessions. The sage told him to go home and ask his wife and children if they were ready to share the sin that he had acquired. When, on reaching home, they told him that he alone was responsible for his deeds, Ratnākara suddenly found himself utterly alone confronting an unknown future. Under the guidance of the sage he then started practising spiritual disciplines, attained illumination in due course, and became Vālmīki, the great saint and India's first and greatest epic poet who wrote the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Other than the legitimate daily effort needed for the fulfilment of the needs of the body like food, clothing and shelter, almost everything that a man does is a struggle for the existence of his ego. However, a time comes in the life of a thoughtful person when he asks himself, for whose sake has he undergone all this struggle? He then finds himself alone in the world. Ultimately everyone finds himself alone. Someday or the other, everyone must confront himself. Even though he is surrounded by people who love him and care for him, he finds that, when it comes to the question of owning moral responsibility for *his* actions, he is alone. Arthur Schopenhauer said: 'What a human being can be to another is not very great deal; in the end every one stands alone; and the important thing is, who is it that stands alone? …. Since everything which exists or happens for a man exists only in his

[1] From Idries Shah, *The Exploits of the Incomparable Mulla Nasrudin* (London: Jonathan Cape, l966) p. 26.

consciousness, and happens for him alone, the most essential thing for man is the constitution of his consciousness.'[2]

We feel very happy when we come by the key or purse we had lost. Far greater will be our joy when we encounter our lost selves. Aristotle said, 'To be happy means to be self-sufficient.' Commenting on this, Schopenhauer remarked, 'Other people's heads are a wretched place to be the home of man's true happiness.'[3] The discovery of the self becomes possible only when we stop looking for it in wrong places, that is to say, when we cease identifying ourselves with other people and their affairs. When we do this during some saner moments, we are likely to find ourselves strangers. We know very little about ourselves although our knowledge of other people and their affairs may be encyclopedic.

To encounter oneself in the depths of one's consciousness is the first milestone an the path to self-realization and maturity. What am I? Who am I to myself? What is my true nature, being, identity? How can I be truly myself? The rising of such questions in a person's mind is a sign of an awakening. This is not of course the higher spiritual awakening which is a direct realization of the light (*prajñā*) of the Ātman. It is an awakening nevertheless; though of a lower order, the significance of which can be known only by those who have had the experience of this interior self-encounter. When his little son first used the pronoun 'I', the German philosopher Fichte (1762-1814) is said to have given a party to celebrate that event. A little boy hears everyone addressing him as 'Ramu', and so he too refers to himself in that way: 'Ramu wants that', 'Ramu did this', he says. The use of the pronoun 'I' is not merely a more convenient and economical use of language, but indicates the dawn of selfhood in the child, the opening of a door within him to vast psychological resources. How many parents try to learn from the lives of their children the lessons they had missed in their own lives?

After the dawn of selfhood it takes many years for the growing adult to confront his own self and understand it. This self-discovery is not a part of the ordinary process of growth, nor does it take place in the lives of all. Only a few people experience it and in them it usually takes the form of a lower self-awakening. This lower awakening may be called 'ego-awakening', the awakening of the ego from its age-long slumber. Unfortunately, little attention is usually paid to this awakening which can alter a person's entire life and destiny dramatically.

Effects of ego-awakening

How does ego-awakening affect human personality and behaviour? A few of the important effects are mentioned below.

1. *Self-acceptance*. The first change that takes place when the ego awakens is the enlargement of one's capacity to understand oneself. The hidden chambers of the mind open wide, and the forgotten or repressed events of the past suddenly come into focus. The seeds of present suffering lie buried in the past. As those seeds get exposed, the awakened person understands how the past events, especially the experiences of childhood, shaped his life. He then realizes that he himself forged most of his own suffering and bondage, and nobody else is responsible for his fate. In other words, he accepts himself with all his weaknesses and defects. He does not try to imitate or become like another person, but rebuilds his present life by rediscovering the experiences of his past. This is precisely what a psychiatrist does for the neurotic—to lead him back to his forgotten past. The awakened person becomes his own psychiatrist.

2. *Modesty*. Self-acceptance leads to modesty. What is modesty? To be and to behave as one really is, without pretensions. Modesty is based on a realistic understanding of one's actual worth, one's strong and weak points. It is a more desirable virtue than humility which is often an artificial attempt to be less than what one really is. Paradoxically, ego-awakening makes people less egoistic. It is the unawakened ego that causes arrogance and vanity.

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[2] Quoted in Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1967) p. 333.

[3] *ibid.*, p. 332.

3. *Openness to reality*. We live in a real world but seldom open ourselves to reality. Each person builds his own inner world of concepts and values, and opens himself only to those aspects of the outer world which do not threaten to destroy his private world. But universal life provides what is called the 'reality check'. It does not correspond to the inner world we have conjured up. It breaks our dreams and subjects our ideals and beliefs to severe tests. When our dreams break and when we fail to pass the tests of universal life, we feel frustrated and blame the world for all our sufferings. This situation changes only when the ego wakes up from its slumber. A person with an awakened ego accepts the world as it is, with all its polarities of goodness and evil, joy and sorrow, love and hate and so on. He does not attempt to change the world but changes himself.

Only an awakened ego can open itself fully to the transcendent Reality. One of the mistakes some spiritual aspirants commit is to try to open themselves to the transcendent Reality, ignoring the realities of empirical life and evading the tests and checks of the outer world. Whatever we gain through our efforts at meditation and prayer must be tested in the outer world; otherwise, spiritual life may become just another extension of the conceptual unreal world we have conjured up. Karma-Yoga provides the best means of testing the inner life in the outer.

4. *Inner-directed life*. Acceptance of the world does not mean surrender to the collective, yielding to lower life, following the mob. No doubt, it is necessary to accept the realities of the outer world and adjust our inner life to its demands, but this adjustment should be 'inner-directed', that is, guided by a set of values derived from our own experiences and aspirations. The life of an unawakened person is 'other directed', that is, guided by a set of values derived from current trends and outer influences. Inner-directed life enables us to follow our own path and at the same time live in harmony with the ever-changing world outside. In this context it is worth noting the words of the American writer Philip Wylie:

An 'adjusted' youth will naturally seek to preserve the one condition to which he knows how to adjust: the safe present state. Actually, his goal should be adjustment to an ever-changing world. Society is in so swift a flux that only a man who deeply knows himself can decide which of the changing ideas he will accept as part of what he believes and feels and is, which ideas ho will reject.

One of the difficult tasks in life is to make correct decisions. The fortunes of a company depend upon the decisions its executives take. Even in an individual's life, wrong decisions can create considerable difficulties. Other conditions being equal, inner-directed people are able to make far greater number of correct decisions and are able to face crises by drawing sustenance from his own inner resources without depending upon other people. A busy executive is known to keep his desk nameplate turned towards himself! His explanation: people who call on him know who he is, but sometimes he tends to forget.[4] Evidently, the man knew that his understanding of himself was more important than other people's opinions about him.

5. *Moral stability*. The morality of a person who has no self-knowledge can never be depended upon. Deep in his unconscious he may harbour repressed drives of lust, anger, greed and vanity which may burst out under certain conditions. A person who has experienced ego-awakening gains the insight to discover his hidden motives and repressed impulses and, even if he is not able to eliminate them fully, he takes all precautions to see that they do not go out of control.

6. *Enrichment of personality*. Unawakened people regard the accumulation of material wealth—money and luxury goods—and sense enjoyment as the desirable ends of man. In modern times the number of material goods and ways of enjoyment have multiplied enormously and the competition to grab them has also been intensified proportionately. This has led to the impoverishment of personality. An increasing number of people are finding their lives empty and meaningless. When man's significance as a person is lost, the only value that he retains is as a commodity. As Eric Fromm remarks, 'Man does not only sell commodities, he sells himself and feels himself to be a commodity.'[5]

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[4] Mentioned in *Reader's Digest,* June 1964, p. 148.

[5] Eric Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Avon Books, 1941) p. 140.

Arthur Miller in his book *Death of a Salesman* brings out the dehumanizing effects of this attitude through the character Willie Loman who had been taught, and in turn taught his sons, that to become rich by getting ahead of the next fellow was the goal of life. Competitive success leaves life empty and meaningless and the tragic truth finally dawns upon Loman that 'He never knew who he was'.[6]

Ego-awakening shifts the tenor of a person's life from what the existentialists describe as the 'being' mode of existence to the 'having' mode of existence;[7] 'marketing-orientation' gets replaced by the struggle for self-realization. Instead of wasting his energy in accumulating things more than is necessary, the awakened person strives to purify, enrich and enlighten his soul. He understands that all the power, joy and beauty that he has been seeking outside reside in his soul, that the accomplishments of his soul alone are his, and what he has acquired in the outer world really belong to the society of which he is a part.

7. *Deepening of love*. In spite of all that poets have written about love, more than half the evil and suffering in the world is caused by impure and misdirected love. One needs self-knowledge to separate pure love from lower instincts, self-interest, moral imperatives, etc. with which it is found compounded. In personal life one of the main causes of failure in love is that people seek love at lower and superficial levels of existence. A man of self-knowledge establishes contacts with people at a deeper inner level and thus makes his love pure and abiding.

Furthermore, his attitude towards others is based on 'empathy', which should be distinguished from 'sympathy'. Sympathy is a rather uncultivated feeling often based on attachment or hidden motives, whereas empathy is the ability to place oneself in another's place and feel as he does. Our sympathy for a person vanishes when he speaks ill of us, but empathy enables us to understand why he does so and to keep our sympathy for him unchanged. It is empathy that the Gītā means when it speaks of *ātmaupamya*.[8]

Ego-awakening and spiritual life

We have seen some of the effects of ego-awakening on secular life. Its effects on spiritual life are none the less important. True spiritual life begins only when the spirit, the inmost Self known as *pratyagātman,* awakens. An important problem is how to attain this spiritual awakening. A powerful Guru can bring this about in his disciple by an exercise of will. But such powerful souls are rare and they will not intervene unless the disciples have prepared themselves for the awakening. As Śrī Rāmakrishna used to say, unless the chick inside the egg is ready to emerge and starts pecking at the shell, the mother bird will not break open the egg. Another way is through intense longing which Śrī Rāmakrishna called *vyākūlatā*. unfortunately, this soul hunger cannot be artificially created, and the number of people who feel it spontaneously is very small indeed.

A large number of spiritual seekers have, therefore, to remain satisfied with some kind of lower awakening which we have termed ego-awakening. However, if this is properly made use of, it will lead to true spiritual awakening in due course. But the difficulty is that it is seldom made use of. There is nothing that people want to know less about than themselves. There is an unwillingness in most people to know more about themselves because it is not a pleasant task to uncover the defects and weaknesses hidden within. Plato said, 'We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark the real tragedy is when men are afraid of the light.' Many people have an irrational fear of themselves, even though there shines within them the lamp of knowledge. This fear manifests itself in their dread of solitude and silence. Many people find life meaningless unless they do something or create or listen to some noise.

Nowadays several popular books on Advaita are available which give the impression that the non-dual experience of Brahman is quite easy to attain. It is not the ego that merges in Brahman but the

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[6] Cited in Rollo May, *Psychology and the Human Dilemma* (New York: D. Van Nostrand & Co., 1967) p. 25.

[7] These two modes of life have been thoroughly discussed by Eric Fromm in his book *To Have or To Be*? (New York: Harper Row, 1976).

[8] *Gītā* 6.32.

inmost Self, *pratyagātman,* which remains eclipsed by the ego. The question of 'merging in' non-dual Brahman arises only after the *pratyagātman* has been realized, and for this it is necessary to transcend the ego first. As stated in the scriptures,[9] devotees who pray to God attain this transcendence through divine grace. But those who follow the path of knowledge, depending only on self-effort, have to confront the ego and slash their way through it; this is what *vicāra,* self-enquiry, means. *Vicāra* is not an easy and comfortable wool-gathering exercise. It needs at least as much intensity as any other spiritual practice.

Those who do not feel intense aspiration must at least intensify their awareness. This intensification of awareness comes through what we have termed 'ego-awakening'. This is an important step in the path of knowledge. One reason why many people gain little progress through Jñāna-Yoga is that they attempt it without undergoing his lower awakening, leave alone the higher awakening of the *pratyagātman*. What they consider Jñāna-Yoga often turns out to be nothing more than reading books and advancing arguments to justify their lack of faith in God and in themselves.

Even in the path of Bhakti self-knowledge is necessary. Even those who have had glimpses of the inner Light have to come down and confront the ego and purify it. The great Spanish mystic St. John of the cross has termed this second descent the 'Second Dark Night of the Soul'. In the Indian Bhakti tradition the devotee is advised to adopt one of the five recognized attitudes (*bhāva*) towards God: the attitude of a servant, of a child, of a friend, of a mother, of a sweetheart. The cultivation of these attitudes are really meant for the sublimation of the ego and, before it is taken up, the ego must be thoroughly studied and purified; otherwise, the spiritual attitudes may get mixed up with worldly emotions and drag the mind to a lower level.

Ego-awakening is very much necessary in the practice of Karma-Yoga. It is not uncommon to find that work makes people egoistic or behave like a bull in a china shop. This happens only when work is done by an unawakened ego. Further-more, as pointed out in an earlier context,[10] the attitudes of selfishness and selflessness are often based on a good deal of self-deception. The nature of this self-deception can be unravelled only by an awakened ego. Karma-Yoga means not only serving the poor and the sick but also bringing about a transformation of one's awareness through that service. Without the support of an awakened ego this transformation will be very slow.

Transformation of the ego

All yogas are based on two fundamental principles. The first principle is that a change in one ego produces a corresponding change in all the other egos connected to it. That is to say, when you change, your social environment changes too. This change need not merely be a subjective experience of your seeing the world in a different light. The microcosm and the macrocosm are built on the same plan, and so a change in your consciousness affects the consciousness of others also.

The second principle is that spiritual life is not merely an attempt to escape from the suffering and evils of life, but also a positive attempt to develop the intrinsic powers and potentialities of the soul. The term 'soul' includes both the Ātman and its shadow, the ego. The Ātman is the same in all people; it is the ego that differs from person to person. It is the ego that produces all the variety in human temperament and behaviour. The ego, like a dome of many-coloured glass, converts the white radiance of the Ātman into all the splendours of life.

The ego should be looked upon not as an obstacle but as a door to higher life. In worldly life this door remains closed; yoga opens it. The proximate aim of yoga is not to eliminate the ego but to transform it. In deep sleep the ego disappears but, on waking up, it reappears with all its defects and problems. This shows that the transformation of the ego is far more important than its elimination.

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[9] cf. The *Gītā* (10.11) 'Out of compassion for them, I, residing in their hearts, destroy the darkness of ignorance...'
The Gospel according to St. Matthew (7:7) says, 'Knock and it shall be opened unto you.'

[10] See, Prabuddha Bhārata Editorial of May, 1985.

Functions of the ego

The above discussion makes it clear that the ego is not an unnecessary or vestigial organ, like the vermiform appendix, and can be removed through psychological surgery. It is the fundamental essence of humanness, and has several vital functions to perform at all stages of one's life. It is worthwhile to know some of these functions.

1. *Self-identity*. The word 'identity' has two meanings. One of these is the ability to distinguish oneself from the surrounding objects. The newborn infant seems to have no idea where his own body leaves off and where the environment begins. It takes several months for him to discover the boundary lines of his own body and distinguish himself from his mummy, daddy and the increasing number of people with whom he comes into contact.

The second meaning is the capacity to identify oneself with other people. The growing boy has to identify himself with his changing circles of friends, teachers, team-mates and, later on, with his wife, children, in-laws and colleagues. Not only that; he has also to identify himself with his caste, religion, culture, social trends, political creed and various other ideas. This identification is so important that a person is often judged by what he identifies himself with.

Thus identity involves two mutually contradictory strivings: to separate oneself from the group and also to become one with the group. The distinctiveness gained in childhood is lost in adolescence. As a result, many young people face an 'identity crisis'.

It is the ego that provides a centre for unifying all experiences. True identity lies in the integrity of the ego, that is, its ability to integrate experiences into its body without losing its own uniqueness. This shows how important it is to have a well-defined ego-profile.

2. *Role and responsibility*. Unlike animal societies like those of ants and bees, which are based mainly on the division of labour, the human society is an extremely complex one. It consists of a web of relationships, and every member has to play a variety of roles. To borrow an example used by Śrī Rāmakrishna, the same Brahmin is called a priest, cook, son, husband and father according to the role he plays. Even in the same role he may have to behave in different ways towards different people. This 'playing the role' is no play at all; every role entails obligation and responsibility. Who plays all these roles and takes up the responsibilities? The ego. Only a mature ego can function well in the complex web of social life.

3. *Self-control and self defence*. Without our being aware of it, the ego is always actively engaged in guarding us from all external and internal dangers that threaten our existence. Even a word of criticism is enough for the ego to react strongly. In fact, excessive egoism is invariably an expression of a person's deep feelings of insecurity. The internal danger is the possibility of one's lower impulses and emotions, going out of control thereby making the person an object of social ridicule. According to Freud, it is the ego that keeps the libidinous instincts in check. His view is not wholly correct; for, to a great extent, bad instincts are kept in check by good instincts. But the ego exercises an overall control. When this control is threatened, it manifests itself as 'anxiety' and, when the control is lost, the person will either behave like a brute or become neurotic.

4. *Evaluation and finding meaning*. Our senses and mind receive innumerable impressions. There must be an agent in us who coordinates these experiences and evaluates them. This agent is again the ego. The same type of experience is evaluated by different people in different ways depending upon the nature of their egos. A second-class pass may be a humiliating experience for a bright student, whereas it may be an uplifting experience for a mediocre student. Another form of evaluation concerns morality. A highly ethical person may feel upset over an inadvertent fib, whereas a scoundrel may reel off any number of lies without batting an eyelid. More important is evaluation of oneself. A great scholar or technical expert may have feelings of inferiority but a dilettante or a quack may be convinced of his superior knowledge or skill.

Much of the knowledge that comes to us is symbolic and has to be interpreted. Who does the interpretation? The ego. Any knowledge or experience that is not related to the ego loses its meaning. Says the eminent psychologist Carl Rogers: 'As experiences occur in the life of the individual, they are either (a) symbolized, perceived and organized into some relationship to the self, (b) ignored because there is no perceived relationship to the self-structure, (c) denied symbolization, or given a distorted symbolization because the experience is inconsistent with the structure of the self.'[11] As a consequence of this screening process by which incoming information is selected, organized and possibly distorted, each individual experiences events and environmental conditions in a somewhat different way. When a person says that life appears meaningless to him, what he means it that he is unable to relate his ego meaningfully to life.

5. *I-Thou relationship*. Man alone is capable of entering into a direct, 'I-Thou' relationship with his fellow-beings. Who establishes this relationship? The ego. Without the ego, human relationships would change into 'it-it' relationships. It is the 'I-Thou' relationship that is called *love*. Where this relationship does not exist there love too does not exist.

Need for a strong and mature ego

Thus we see that the ego performs several important functions in everyone's life. In fact, it is the real performer, doer, *kartā* , in us. It gives to every man his uniqueness, relates him to his fellowmen and makes social life rich, variegated and meaningful. The ego is the ever-vigilant sentinel in us guarding us from all external and internal dangers. It is our 'internal auditor', judge and critic. It is the dreamer, visionary, seeker in us. It is our interpreter and mediator—mediating between the Ātman and the world.

Such a vital and inseparable part of our personality cannot be so easily eliminated from our lives. Śrī Rāmakrishna used to say, 'it is true that one or two can get rid of the "I" through Samādhi, but these cases are very rare. You may indulge in thousands of reasonings, but still the "I" comes back. You may cut the peepul-tree to the very root today, but you will notice a sprout springing up tomorrow.'[12]

Nor is there any immediate necessity to eliminate the ego from our lives. The ego in itself is not a problem. The real problem is its immaturity, ignorance and wrong behaviour. Most of our failures, blunders and sufferings are caused by the weakness and immaturity of the ego. Life bristles with unfavourable conditions, uncertainties and temptations. What is needed most to face them is a strong and mature ego. A person with a weak ego easily breaks down under stress or yields to the temptations of the flesh. It is the weak ego that prompts people to take recourse to cheating, lying, scandal-mongering and underhand dealings. That is why Nietzsche said, 'The world has to fear nothing from the strong but only from the weak'.

We often find that the cock of the walk and the swashbuckler succeed in gaining wealth, power and fame, wicked people thrive like weeds, whereas virtuous and humble people seem to fail in their undertakings or go to the wall. What is the cause of this? Life consists of two streams of power: the power of goodness (*dharma*) and the power of evil (*adharma*). Wicked people open themselves freely to the stream of evil and acquire its power. If virtuous people also opened themselves fully to the stream of goodness, they too would get its power, the power of *dharma*. But this they seldom do because of the weakness of the ego. Instead of opening themselves to the cosmic stream of goodness, the goody-goody people are often found to spend a lot of time worrying about the vices of other people, feeling jealous of those who have gone up by hook or by crook, or else desperately trying to prevent themselves from sliding into the stream of evil. Had all good people been as strong as wicked people, virtue would always have triumphed over evil. To fight evil one must first of all open oneself fully to the power of goodness. A top police official in an erstwhile princely State of India became famous as a Vedānta teacher and spiritual guide with some following in India and Europe. He was frequently asked how

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[11] Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961) p. 503.

[12] *The Gospel of Sri Rāmakrishna* (Madras: Sri Rāmakrishna Math, 1974) p. 103.

could reconcile his spiritual life with the unpleasant task of dealing with criminals and murderers. His answer was that the police department provided the best opportunity to practise virtue and fight vice.

Only a strong and pure ego can open itself fully to the cosmic stream of *dharma*. This is one of the reasons why Swami Vivekānanda stressed so much the importance of strength. We need strength, not to do harm to or quarrel with other people, but to forbear and forgive, to lead a holy life and, above all, to seek God. It is good to keep in mind that the elimination of the ego takes place only at the highest level of mystic experience. At the lower levels of spiritual life a strong and holy ego is necessary to withstand the strain of prolonged meditation, to persevere on the path and to resist temptations.

We should be able to distinguish between the fundamental existential problems common to all mankind and the psychological problems of individuals. These two sets of problems often get mixed up especially in the lives of spiritual seekers. The basic existential problems like those regarding happiness, suffering, fear, love and death can be solved only at the highest level of Ātman-Brahman, and for this it is necessary to transcend the ego. But apart from these, there are the problems of day-to-day life, which vary from one individual to another, caused by wrong attitudes, thinking, actions and social conditions. It is to solve these psychological problems that we need a strong and awakened ego. In this connection it should be noted that when modern psychologists like Jung, Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow speak of 'integration', 'open self' and 'self-actualization', and when even Karl Marx speaks of 'self-realization', what they all refer to is the ego, and not the transcendent Ātman of which most western psychologists know next to nothing.

Egoism and selfishness

If the ego is important in life, how are we to account for egoism and selfishness which are considered the bane of human life? The answer is that the terms 'ego' and 'egoism' do not mean the same. 'Ego' refers to the feeling of 'I', while 'egoism' refers to the feeling of 'me'. The ego is the core of personality structure, the doer or agent. To be simply aware of oneself as 'I am what I am' or 'I did this' is not harmful. It becomes harmful only when the ego identifies itself with the roles it plays in life and refers to itself as me. Egoism is thus a wrong type of self-objectification. If a policeman, a government officer, a doctor or a businessman thinks of himself simply as a human being, it is not egoism; we may call it egoity or selfhood. But it becomes egoism when the person, forgetting his basic humanity, regards himself as a policeman, doctor or businessman. These social roles are *upādhis* (limiting adjuncts) and it is the identification of the ego with the *upādhis* that is egoism.

The *Gītā* has carefully and clearly distinguished between ego and egoism. In one verse the ego is included as one among the eight categories of lower Prakṛti;[13] in another verse it is included as one among the twenty-four categories of Sāmkhya philosophy.[14] In both these contexts the ego, *ahamkārah,* is regarded either as a mental faculty or as an essential ingredient of Nature. On the other hand, egoism is regarded as a vice, sinful tendency or demoniacal disposition (*āsurīsampat*).[15]

Now let us consider selfishness. Here again the distinction between 'self' and 'selfishness' is to be kept in mind. In this context the term 'self' refers to the ego, while 'selfishness' refers to the feeling of 'mine'. Selfishness is the tendency of the ego to appropriate to itself things belonging to universal life. In Hindu scriptures this feeling of mineness towards objects is known as *mamatā*. When this attitude is given up, a person is said to become *nirmamah,* a term which occurs repeatedly in the *Gītā*[16]. In English he is said to have become 'selfless'. The term 'selfless' does not necessarily imply that the person is devoid of the self—for he may still retain the ego—but it means that the ego gives up its grasping, possessing, retaining tendency.

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[13] {Sanskrit} *Gītā* 7.4.

[14] {Sanskrit} *Gītā* 13.5.

[15] {Sanskrit} *Gītā* 16.18 : 18.53,
{Sanskrit} *Gītā* 18.59.

[16] cf. *Gītā* 2.71; 3.30; 12.13; 18.53.

So then, unlike the ego which is a simple feeling of 'I' as the agent, egoism is feeling of 'mine'. Whereas egoism represents the ego's wrong attitude towards itself selfishness represents its wrong attitude towards the world.

Both egoism and selfishness are expressions of the ego's struggle for its own existence. They are defence mechanisms operating mostly in the unconscious. A person may not therefore be aware that he is egoistic or selfish. This is true, paradoxically, of selflessness also; it may be an expression of self-defence or of fear or hatred of oneself of which the person. may not be aware.[17] The difference between selfishness and selflessness in unawakened people is really not as great as is popularly believed to be. This kind of unconscious struggle for the existence of the ego—which in some people takes the form of selfishness and in others, the form of selflessness—drains the energies of the psyche and makes the ego weak. Such a weak ego becomes unfit to practise spiritual disciplines.

It is only when the ego-awakening takes place that we realize that this struggle is unnecessary and futile. Some struggle is certainly necessary for the maintenance of the physical body, but not for that of the ego. The ego is sustained by the stream of universal life, and is therefore self-existent. When the ego awakens, it gives up egoism and selfishness and remains simply as it really is—the ego. Such a free and strong ego can transcend itself and realize its true nature as the Ātman.

[17] This point was discussed in detail in the Editorial of May 1985.

PRABUDDHA BHARATA, AUGUST 1985

THE EGO AND THE SELF

(EDITORIAL)

The two selves

The *Gītā* makes a rather paradoxical statement in the following verses:

> One should uplift oneself by oneself; one should not lower oneself. For oneself is verily ones own friend; oneself is verily one's own enemy.
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> To a self-possessed person, by whom the self has been conquered by the self, the self is a friend. But in a self-alienated person the self remains in a state of enmity, as if it were an (external) enemy.[1]

These verses have been interpreted in different ways[2] which, however, converge upon three main points: 1. there are apparently two selves: a lower self or the ego and a higher Self, the *pratyagātman* or inmost Self; 2. one should not create inner conflicts by alienating the two selves from each other; 3. when properly integrated, these two selves help each other and in the attainment of the ultimate goal of life.

Self-alienation, selfishness and unselfishness

The problem of the two selves is directly connected to the problem of egoism and selfishness discussed in the editorials of the last three months (May, June and July). It was shown that selfishness need not be a sign of self-love, nor the selflessness of unawakened people be a sign of love for others. There is not so much difference between the selfishness and unselfishness of unawakened people as is popularly believed to be. Both are nothing but mental habits acquired in the course of one's growing up by following two different attitudes towards oneself.

Our attitude towards objects is of two kinds: 'towards' or 'away from'. We tend to move towards friendly people and pleasant things, and tend to move away from unfriendly people and unpleasant things. This is true of our attitude towards ourselves also. Movement 'towards' one's lower self or ego is selfishness, movement 'away from' the ego is unselfishness. A person moves 'towards' his ego when the existence of the ego is threatened and he feels insecure. When this urge becomes a permanent habit, he appears to be selfish to other people. Similarly, a person moves 'away from' his ego when he feels ashamed of it or afraid of it. (In a few spiritual people this 'away from' movement may be caused by the attraction for the higher Self or God.) When this urge becomes habitual, the person appears to be unselfish to others.

In both these movements a certain degree of self-alienation takes place. The selfish person gets alienated from the higher Self, whereas the unselfish person gets alienated from his lower self. Self-alienation produces deep inner conflicts of which many people are not aware. A personality torn by conflicts cannot enjoy peace and fulfilment. This is the reason why many people, both selfish and unselfish, are seldom found to be happy. An unselfish person may be more popular and socially acceptable than a selfish person, but if he feels self-alienation and disquiet, he is not inwardly better off

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[1] *Bhagavad Gītā* 6.5,6.

[2] Traditional commentators are neither unanimous nor unambiguous in their interpretation of these Verses. Ananda Giri, following Śamkara, assumes the existence of a lower self and a higher self. The Lower self is *kārya-kāraṇa samghāta,* 'aggregate of cause and effect', that is, the ego-system consisting of the body, mind and senses. Madhusūdana Sarasvati understands the first 'Ātman' as the *manas* or mind, and the second 'Ātman' as jīva, the embodied self. According to his interpretation, 'the embodied self should be uplifted by the discriminating mind (*viveka-yuktena manasā*)'. Rāmānuja too takes the first 'Ātman' to mean *manas* but takes the second 'Ātman' to mean the inner Self (*Pratyagātman*). According to him, 'one should uplift the inner Self with the help of the purified mind (*viṣayānanusaktena manasā*). Swami Swarupānanda.'s interpretation, that it is the higher Self that should uplift the lower self, is in accord with the teaching of his master Swami Vivekānanda who regarded the higher Self as the source of all power and perfection.

than the selfish person. The selfish person, being self-centred, has at least a 'centre' to hold on to, whereas the unselfish person may not have any such centre within him, and may thus become dependent on other people. That is why the 'go-getter' is usually found to succeed in life while the 'do-gooder' is often found to be shiftless or drifting in life which he finds meaningless. The condition of the do-gooder may even become worse when he turns to spiritual life, for there he is asked to shun his lower self and seek a higher Self which he does not know, or love God whom he does not see.

As long as self-alienation persists, as long as one part of the personality remains estranged from the other part, neither selfishness nor unselfishness can solve man's problems. This statement is not intended to discourage selfless work or social service. It has been made only to emphasize the need for self-integration and awakening. Unselfishness and humility should not be based on self-alienation or ignorance of one's own self. Love and selflessness are sacred attitudes; as such, they should not be left to blind urges and impulses. Well-meaning but unawakened people through their impulsive selflessness and humility often create more troubles (for themselves and for others) than selfish and arrogant people do.

Ego and egoism

The point is, there is a good deal of self-deception in our attitudes, motives and actions. Self-deception is caused by ignorance. In Indian scriptures ignorance, *ajñāna* or *avidyā* is generally used to denote ignorance of the higher Self. But there are lower types of ignorance too, especially about the ego. This lower ignorance is as important as the higher ignorance which conceals the Ātman. Lower ignorance is of two types: ignorance of the difference between the ego and egoism, and ignorance of the difference between the ego and higher Self or Ātman.

The ego is a simple awareness of 'I' as a living entity. It is the detachable core of human personality. Egoism is the attachment of this 'I' to the inner impulses, memories, ideas and external objects. Only an unawakened ego gets attached in this way. The ego in itself is neither good nor bad; it is its behaviour that makes it so. So the real problem regarding egoism is not the ego itself but its unawakened condition. it is no use blaming a person for his selfishness or arrogance, for he is unawakened and is not aware of the causes and consequences of his wrong attitude. Nor do unawakened people deserve all the praise that they get for their selflessness and humility. Both selfish and unselfish people need to be awakened. When they wake up, the conflict between selfishness and unselfishness will disappear, and these attitudes will merge into one total outlook in which oneself and other people have their right place.

Ego-awakening

What is really important is the awakening of the ego. What does ego-awakening mean?[3] It means freedom from the two types of lower *ajñāna* or ignorance mentioned above. A person in whom the ego has awakened understands the difference between the ego and egoism and between the ego and the higher Self or Ātman. He does not condemn his ego nor try to escape from it. Rather, he tries to detach it from its entanglements and to integrate it with the higher Self.

How does ego-awakening take place? In some people it lakes place spontaneously at certain critical moments or through traumatic experiences. The others need the help of a wise guide or perhaps of a professional psychiatrist. In spiritual life one of the functions of the Guru is to bring about ego-awakening in the disciple. Many people who turn to spiritual life have unawakened egos. At least half of their difficulties, conflicts and problems are caused by the unawakened condition of their egos. Before the awakening of the Ātman or of the *kuṇdalinī* becomes possible, these people need to undergo ego-awakening first. In order to understand the real greatness of the Guru and follow his instructions the disciple must have at least an awakened ego. It is indeed difficult for a Guru to guide an unawakened disciple who has built an impregnable wall of egoism around his heart. Very often the Guru has to act as a psychiatrist and make the disciple discover the foundation of his own egoism, selfishness, misdirected

[3] Ego-awakening was discussed in the July 1985 Editorial.

charity, carelessness and other defects. This the Guru may do through advice, sometimes through a scolding or studied neglect. Only a person who has lived with and faithfully served his Guru or an illumined soul knows how the Guru breaks the wall of egoism within him and liberates his ego. Once the ego of the disciple is liberated, the Guru finds it easy to prepare him for the higher spiritual awakening.

In *The Gospel of Śrī Rāmakrishna* we find Śrī Rāmakrishna bringing about the ego-awakening in M. during M.'s second visit to the Master. Through a few pithy and pointed replies the Master shattered M.'s egoism, and the freed ego became receptive to spiritual instructions. In the *Gītā* we find Arjuna undergoing a similar ego-awakening spontaneously (perhaps it was brought about by the will of Krishna) and only after this did he become fit to receive spiritual instruction from Krishna.

Many—though not all—of the spiritual experiences described in Zen books as *satori* are clearly instances of ego-awakening. Careful writers on Zen, however, make a distinction between this lower awakening and the true higher spiritual awakening by calling the former *kensho* (*chien-hsing* in Chinese) and the latter *satori* (*wu* in Chinese).[4] The ancient Chinese Zen (ch'an) master Han Shan spoke of two types of awakening (*wu*): the 'understanding-wu' (*chieh-wu*) and the 'realization-wu' (*cheng-wu*). According to him, the first *wu* is only a pseudo-awakening which, nevertheless, gives a deep insight into the nature of subject-object relations. Evidently, this corresponds to what we have termed 'ego-awakening'. The second *wu* is the true spiritual awakening which corresponds to the awakening of the *pratyagātman* mentioned earlier. Han Shan points out that this second or 'realization' *wu* 'has different degrees of profundity.'[5]

The ego and the Self

We have seen that ego-awakening produces two kinds of knowledge: knowledge of the difference between the ego and egoism, and knowledge of the difference between the ego and the higher Self. We have already discussed the first type of difference. We now turn to the difference between the ego and the Self.

There are four main views regarding the relation between the ego and the higher Self. According to one view the ego and the Self are one and the same. Another view holds that they are entirely different from each other. Yet another view is that the higher Self alone is real and the ego is only an appearance. The fourth view regards both the ego and the higher Self as equally unreal.

All the four schools are represented in western philosophy, although the problem of the self has never been given a central place in it.[6] The first view seems to be the one most widely prevalent from ancient times. Plato regarded the soul as one but having three functionally different parts: reason, will and feeling. This image of the tripartite soul has dominated western thought ever since.

Kant (1724-1804) made a radical departure by positing two kinds of self: the empirical and the transcendental. The empirical self exists on the phenomenal level and it knows the world in manifold ways with the help of the a-priori categories possessed by it. The transcendental self is that which subordinates the changing empirical self. It is permanent and incomprehensible because the categories of knowledge are not applicable to it. It is known as the presupposition of all knowledge, being the ultimate subject of knowledge which cannot be objectified.[7]

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[4] See, Roshi Philip Kapleau, *Three Pillars of Zen* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969) p.335.

[5] See, Chang Chen-Chi, *The Practice of Zen* (London: Rider and Co., 1960) pp. 94.

[6] The different concepts of the soul in western thought were discussed in the November 1983 Editorial.

[7] Though the view of Kant has some similarity to that of Śamkara, there are several differences between them. (a) Kant does not hold that the empirical self is unreal and merges into the transcendental self in the state of liberation, as Śamkara holds. (b) Śamkara regards the transcendental Self as the sole reality, Whereas Kant believes in the reality of the phenomenal world, of the empirical self and the thing-in-itself. (c) According to Kant, the thing-in-itself is unknowable, whereas according to Śamkara, the transcendental absolute can be intuitively experienced as one's innermost Self.

The third view of the self may be found in the works of the British philosopher F.H. Bradley (1846-1924). Using non-contradictoriness as the test of reality, Bradley posited the Absolute as the sole reality and everything else, including the self, as unreal. According to him the self is only an appearance; it changes and has only a relative existence—it exists only in relation with and contradistinction to the not-self.[8] The German philosopher Fichte (1762-1814) developed a solipsistic view by making the ego the ultimate Reality. According to him, the essence of the ego consists in will, knowledge and activity, and the world has no independent existence apart from the existence of the ego. Hegel (1770-1831) regarded individual selves as the ever-developing evolutes of one absolute Self.

The fourth view of the self was championed by the Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-76), though not as rigorously as the Buddhists did. Coming to Indian thought, we find the first view held by three Nyāya-Vaiśeşika philosophers. According to them the Ātman or Self is nothing but the ego. It knows itself as the subject of all experiences. The self is a substance (*dravya*) and knowledge (*jñāna*) or consciousness is an attribute (*guṇa*) of it.[9] The self has two more properties: desire (*icchā*) and volition (*yatna*). These three attributes of the self become manifest only when the Ātman is in conjunction with the *manas* (mind).

In the Vedāntic schools of Rāmānuja and Madhva also the ego and the self are regarded as one and the same, but the conception of the self in these schools is entirely different from that in the Nyāya-Vaiśeşika system. According to both Rāmānuja and Madhva the Self is the seat of consciousness or knowledge. Rāmānuja believes that the soul has two kinds of knowledge: *svarūpa-jñāna* by which it knows itself, and *dharmabhūta-jñāna* by which it knows other objects. Both the teachers hold that the self is also the seat of the will, and is both the agent of action (*kartā*) and enjoyer (*bhoktā*).

The second view, which regards the ego and the higher self as entirely separate, was developed in India mainly by the Sāmkhya philosophers. According to them the ego belongs not to the true Self called Puruşa, but to Prakṛti or Nature. The real self is so transcendental that it is untouched by 'I'.[10] In other words, the ego is outside the real nature of man. The ego is *ahamkāra* which literally means the 'I-maker'; it is the individuating principle which separates one thing from another. Everything—the mind, the sense organ, even the atom and the molecule—has its own ego. If there were no ego, the whole universe would be one uniform, homogeneous mass. This is indeed a unique doctrine. In no other school is found such a total separation of the ego from the Self.

The illogicality of the Sāmkhya theory of the self is avoided in the Advaitic theory of the self—the third of the four theories mentioned above. Advaita Vedānta too keeps the distinction between the ego and the higher Self (known as the Ātman), but the two are brought into intimate relationship with each other. The ego is the *granthi* or knot between *cit* or spirit and *jada* or matter. This *cijjada-granthi* is what the Advaitins call *jīva* or empirical self. Vidyāraṇya describes this 'knot' as follows: 'The substratum of pure consciousness, the subtle body, and the reflection of pure consciousness on the subtle body—these three together constitute a Jīva.'[11] The ego is thus a compound (*samghāta*) consisting of both material and spiritual elements. The spiritual element, the reflection of pure consciousness is what is known as

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[8] As Bosanquet pointed out, Bradley was influenced by several thought currents including, perhaps, Śamkara's philosophy. But, unlike Śamkara, Bradley did not regard the Absolute as the Supreme Self.

[9] *Tarkasamgraha* 2.8.

[10] At the same time, the Sāmkhyas hold that the Purusas are innumerable. But, in the absence of an individuating principle like the ego, they are not able to show how one Purusa differs from another. Commenting on this, Prof. M. Hiriyanna says: 'In themselves, it is hard to see how the Purusas can differ from one another. There is not even a semblance of explanation here as in the Nyāya-Vaiśeşika, where each self is stated to be inherently characterized by its own *visesa.' Outlines of Indian Philosophy* (London: George Allen and Unwin, l956) p. 280.

[11] {Sanskrit} Vidyāraṇya, *Pañcadaśī* 4.11.

the *pratyagātman* or inner Self. Behind this reflection lies the infinite, non-dual Supreme Self known as both Ātman and Brahman.'[12]

Furthermore, Advaita philosophers make a distinction between the ego and egoism. The ego is, as mentioned above, a knot between matter and spirit, whereas egoism (*ahamkāra*) is one of the four faculties of the mind (*antahkaraṇa*)—*the* other three faculties being the *buddhi*, *manas and citta*. Egoism is the tendency of the mind to appropriate experiences as one's own. It is egoism that creates the sense of being a *kartā* (agent of action) and *bhoktā* (enjoyer).

The fourth theory of the self was developed by the Buddhists. They too regard the ego (often called *pudgala*) as a compound (*samghāta*) but, unlike the Advaitins, they deny the existence of a transcendent self. There is no such thing as a chariot apart from its component parts like the wheels etc. Similarly, there is no separate entity as the ego other than the assemblage of the five *skandhas—rūpa* (form), *vedanā* (sensation), *samjñā* (perception), *samghāta* (volition) and *vijñāna* (Consciousness). Thus both the ego and self are illusory.

Integration of the two selves

Of the four views it is the Advaitic theory of two levels of the self that seems to provide the best solution to the existential problems of man. It reconciles the conflict between love for oneself and love for others. According to the Advaitic theory, the lower self or ego is neither an evil nor an external appendage to be got rid of. Being the 'knot' of *cit* and *jada,* it contains the reflection of the light of pure consciousness and is therefore potentially divine. What is bad is egoism (*ahamkāra*) by which is meant the tendency to appreciate things horn universal life for the use of the ego and the anxious desire to protect the ego. Only an unawakened ago has this tendency. When the ego awakens, it gives up egoism and, recognizing the divine element in it, seeks to realize its source. This search marks the beginning of true spiritual life.

This spiritual quest leads to the discovery of the source of consciousness in the higher Self, the Ātman. This shows that the lower self is not an obstacle to spiritual life; rather, it is a great help. Spiritual life is not an attempt to run away from one's lower self but an attempt to confront it, purify it and transform it. The ego is after all only a 'knot', and spiritual practice is primarily aimed at untying this knot. When the knot of ego is untied, the *jada* or insentient part of it drops off and the *cit* or sentient part alone shines as *prajñā,* the light of the *pratyagātman*. The ego has now been divinized and transformed into the inner Self.

When this happens, egoism, selfishness and self-love give place to love for the inner Self. Since this inner Self is one with the Supreme Self, Paramātman or Brahman, love for one's own inner Self necessarily implies love for all beings. Indeed, only a person who takes his stand on the higher Self can have pure unselfish love for others. If we wish to have unselfish and pure love for other people, we must find out its source in the higher Self within us. If we wish to bridge the gulf between us and our fellow-men, we must first bridge the gulf between the ego and higher Self within us.

[12] Vidyāraṇya calls the *pratyagātman* the kutastha, the unchanging witness which is different from the reflection. According to him, and to the Vivarana school in general, it is the kutastha, not the jīva, that is identical with Brahman. See *Pañcadaśī* 8, 46-49.

PRABUDDHA BHARATA, SEPTEMBER 1985

SELFHOOD AND MATURITY

(EDITORIAL)

Maturity and ego-development

Life bristles with problems and difficulties, and no person can possibly hope to lead a problem-free life. But then, there are solutions too; almost every problem of life has its own solution, though it may not be always to our liking. Failures and sufferings in life are caused not so much by any lack of solutions as by our inability to face the problems and find and apply the right type of solution. This inability is to a large extent caused by immaturity. In psychological parlance the term 'immaturity' does not necessarily imply insufficient age or experience but refers primarily to the development of the ego and the way it responds to situations.

Human development takes place along five main channels: physical, emotional, intellectual, egoic and spiritual. Of these the first three are well known. Physical development reaches its peak in middle age and then declines. Emotional development includes the development of primary drives like the sex instinct and also the refinement of their derivatives known as feelings, sentiments etc. Intellectual development means the cultivation of the powers of the mind and the acquisition of knowledge. The ego is that part of the personality which organizes the functions of the other parts into goal-oriented work, relates the personality meaningfully to reality and defends it against internal and external dangers. The development of the ego is in itself a distinct process. Apart from this, there is spiritual development by which is meant the unveiling of the light of the *pratyagātman,* the unfolding of its powers, and its attunement to the ultimate Reality known as Paramātman or Brahman.

It is the development of the ego that determines the maturity of the personality. Two points are to be noted in this context. Ego development is not the same as the development of all the faculties of the mind or the functions of the ego. It is not necessarily linked to the development of emotions and the intellect. A person may be a brilliant scholar or a highly accomplished artist but may behave in an immature way in dealing with people and situations.

The second point is that ego development is independent of age level. During early infancy the first four types of development may be indistinguishable from one another, but from later childhood onwards ego development follows an independent course. Psychologists like Binet have shown that the mental age (MA) of a person is different from his chronological age (CA). The MA of a five-year-old may be the same as the MA of a ten-year-old. At twenty-five years an Indian youth, heavily dependent on his parents, may not have the maturity of an American youth of eighteen years who has developed self-reliance from boyhood.

This point often becomes pathetically clear in many old people who show a warped, stunted and immature ego. A young man has time enough to rectify his mistakes and overcome his weaknesses. But the old man has little time left to start a new life; his sands are running out. Wisdom does not grow on a tree, nor does it come to anyone naturally in the course of growing up. The process of acquiring wisdom and maturity should therefore be consciously and thoroughly attempted in youth itself, for, as the saying goes, 'There is no fool like an old fool.'

Maturity and conformity

Before proceeding to discuss what maturity is, it is necessary to point out what maturity is not. During the early years of the present century psychologists tended to measure maturity in terms of conformity and social acceptability. A mature person was believed to be one who lived a well-adjusted life in conformity with the customs and norms of his social group, steering clear of all troubles and interpersonal conflicts. And all those who failed to adjust themselves to the conditions and demands of the society were branded as immature or neurotic. Freudian psychologists in particular identified

neurosis with maladjustment, and their sole concern was to make their patients adjust themselves to the society.

This trend was changed, if not wholly abandoned, only with the emergence of the humanistic or 'Third Force' psychologies of Eric Fromm, Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow and others in the early fifties. These psychologists have shown that social adjustment is often attained at the cost of creativity and spontaneity and that many of the apparently well-adjusted people harbour a deeply repressed sense of insecurity, meaninglessness etc. Says Eric Fromm:

> The 'adjusted' person has made himself into a commodity with nothing stable or definite except his need to please and his readiness to change roles. As long as he succeeds in his efforts he enjoys a certain amount of security, but his betrayal of the higher self, of human values, leaves an inner emptiness and insecurity which will become manifest when anything goes wrong in his battle for success. And even if nothing should go wrong, he often pays for human failure with ulcers, heart trouble or any other psychically determined kinds of illness…. (The) vast majority of people in our culture are well adjusted because they have given up the battle for independence sooner and more radically than the neurotic person. They have accepted the judgement of the majority so completely that they have been spared the sharp pain of conflict which the neurotic person goes through. While they are healthy from the standpoint of 'adjustment', they are more sick than the neurotic person from the standpoint of the realization of their aims as human beings.[1]

In one experiment conducted in 1978, Dr. D.L. Rosenhan of Stanford University, California, planted eight sane volunteers, one of them a psychiatrist, in the public and private wards of some mental hospitals in America. Many of the insane patients detected the fraud and recognized the eight imposters but none of the medical staff ever did. It is now being increasingly recognized that the members of human society constitutes a spectrum with no sharp dividing lines between the neurotic and the normal. This has made psychologists abandon conformity as a criterion of maturity. Mature individuals do lead a well-adjusted social life but without blindly following the herd, without surrendering their conscience to the collective, without craving for other people's recognition.

Under certain circumstances maturity finds expression through non-conformity, non-adjustment, as for instance when one has to hold out against injustice and evil or when one has to deal firmly with immature or erring individuals. Norman Vincent Peale, the distinguished American clergyman and author, after several years spent in teaching the value and means of attaining success and social acceptance, discovered the danger inherent in a life of slavish conformity to a decadent society. In an article published a few years ago in *Guideposts* he wrote:

> All my life I have preached and written about the value of positive thinking. And I still believe that affirmative attitudes are supremely important in successful living. But affirmatives alone are not enough. This world is full of hope and joy, but it is also beset by evil, immorality and sin. You can't say 'Yes' to these things, or even 'Perhaps'. You have to say 'No! '—and you have to make it stick.

According to Dr. Peale there are at least three critical areas where the 'power of the positive No!' should be applied. The first of these concerns children and youths. Young people expect elders to correct them and, when they do mischief or make unreasonable demands, parents and teachers must have the courage to say 'No!' to them. Another area lies in interpersonal dealings in society. Dr. Peale cites the example of a business executive who suffered from acute conflict because of his inability to say 'No!' to one of his star salesmen who was found misappropriating money by cooking accounts. When, on the advice of the pastor, the executive dealt firmly with the dishonest salesman, the latter apologized and mended his ways. Lastly, we have to say 'No!' to ourselves, to self-indulgence, to all inherent tendencies in us to follow the wrong path.

The ego and the society

We have seen that maturity refers to ego development and that conformity to other people's ways of life and opinion need not be a sign of maturity. Nevertheless, since the development of the ego takes place chiefly through its interaction with the society, an understanding of the nature of this interaction is essential to understand the nature of the ego and the degree of maturity it has attained.

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[1] Eric Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967) pp. 73-80.

The difference between the ego or the lower self and the Ātman or the higher Self was discussed in last month's editorial.[2] It should be noted here that Indian thought as a whole has specialized in the study of the higher Self and has not paid the same degree of attention to the ego. The reverse is true of western thought. The key to understanding the ego lies in its interaction with the society, and in this field western thought has much to offer, although the emergence of ego psychology is a recent trend in it.

In western psychology, during the early years of its development, the mind was regarded as a passive receiver and coordinator of stimuli, and investigations were chiefly directed to cognitive processes. Freud brought about a revolution in western psychology. He conceived the mind as a dynamic state and made psychology primarily a study of instinctual drives. However, he went to the other extreme by holding that the nature of human personality was wholly determined by these drives and impulses. It was precisely on this issue that his first disciple Alfred Adler broke away from his camp. Adler looked upon human personality as constituted chiefly by the ego, an organizing and striving agent, through which the drives find expression. Since the death of Freud most psychoanalysts have stressed the importance of the ego.

Meanwhile, sociology was developing fast and a meeting of the two disciplines—psychology and sociology—was inevitable. The pioneering work of Karen Homey and others showed that many of the psychological problems of life (for which Freud held individuals alone responsible) were in fact caused by unfavourable social conditions. Not only the course of a man's life but his very personality is shaped and conditioned by the society he lives in. We not only internalized the values, norms and symbols of the society we grew up in, but these external factors have, without our notice, built the ego's frame-work.

Theories of ego as a social phenomenon

The study of ego development through social interaction has given rise to several theories regarding the nature of the ego. An extreme view is the stimulus-response (S-R) theory of behaviourists like B.F. Skinner. In his controversial book *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* Skinner rejects the notion of an autonomous person endowed with freedom and dignity. According to him the human being is almost wholly a product of his environment, and what appears as the self is nothing but a conditioned state of the brain, the sum total of all the responses of the organism to countless external stimuli. Skinner has only articulated the belief of the majority of western scientists, but in recent years some developments in Quantum Mechanics have shaken the foundations of this belief.

Though Karl Marx was a materialist, he did not subscribe to the purely mechanistic view of man held by western scientists. For him labour is not mere S-R; rather, it is man's self-expression and a means of attaining self-realization. As is clear from his famous comparison between the bee and the architect, Marx distinguished between instinct and self-conscious activity. Furthermore, Marx conceived man as having two selves: one representing the real or actual man suffering in a competitive world, and the other representing the true or ideal man endowed with great potential for development. Marx also held that man could attain his full humanity only in community through loving co-operation.[3]

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[2] As pointed out in earlier Editorials, Indian thought makes a distinction between ego and egoism. The ego is a simple awareness of 'I', whereas egoism is the identification of this 'I' with the mind, thoughts, emotions and various social factors internalized in the form of *samskāras*. This distinction between ego and egoism can be understood through introspection. But since most people almost always completely identify themselves with their inner and outer worlds, this distinction between ego and egoism is ignored in the following discussion. This distinction is seldom found in western thought.

[3] It was from Feuerbach that Marx got the concept of the 'community man'. Marx developed his ideas on man early in his life and presented them in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscript,* written at the age of twenty-six, but they were studied in depth only in recent years, and that too chiefly by American and European scholars. For an excellent study of Marx's philosophy of man see, Adam Schaff, *Marxism and the Human Individual* (New York: Mcgraw Hill, 1970).

The American philosopher George Herbert Mead developed another view of man as a 'social self'.[4] According to him the self is not a content but an activity. The self arises in the context of the social act, which means the act at an individual modified or qualified in its course by the act of another person. To Mead, mental activity is social, and the individual is a miniature society. Just as the society modifies the individual, so the individual modifies society. Instead of saying that the individual preceded society or vice versa, Mead takes the stand that self and society are twin-born.

Furthermore, Mead explains human nature in terms of 'I' and 'me'. The latter is created by social participation in various groups to which a person belongs; the roles he plays in society appear as the 'me'. But the self is not merely a product of all these social roles because it includes the 'I' as well. This 'I' functions as the organizing centre of all influences exerted upon the self. It is in the notion of 'I' as an autonomous functioning of the self that Mead differs from Skinner and others who identify the whole self with the 'me' as a product of the environment.[5]

Another great thinker who studied the formation of the human self through social interaction was the Jewish mystic and philosopher Martin Buber. His doctrine of life as a *dialogue* between 'I' and 'Thou' stands in contrast to the Hegelian-Marxian concept of *dialectic* based on conflict. A distinguishing feature of man is his ability to establish relationships. These are of two types: I-It and I-Thou. The I-It is an impersonal subject-object relation like that of a botanist with a plant. The I-Thou relationship is personal and mutual; in it both I and Thou are treated as subjects with neither of them becoming an object; it is a self-to-self contact. This is what characterizes most of the social relationships. Buber's view is that it is through the 'Thou' that a man becomes 'I'. 'I became through my relation to the Thou, as I become I, I say Thou'.[6] According to Buber the uniqueness of man is to be found neither in the individual nor in the collective but in the meeting of 'I' and 'Thou'.

Awareness of collective self—its practical consequences

We have discussed these theories of the self not because of their theoretical significance but because of their practical value. These theories are based on partial truths but they all point to one central truth: that the ego of man is an integral part of the human society. Not merely functionally but even structurally each of us is related to the society in a far more intimate way than we are aware of. What we now are is largely the creation of the society. Even the language we speak has been acquired through social intercourse.

Vedānta recognizes two dimensions of the self: the ego or lower self and the *pratyagātman* or the transcendent inner self. Corresponding to these, there are two dimensions of the cosmic self known as the Virāṭ and Hiraṇyagarbha respectively. All egos are parts of the Virāṭ and all inner selves are parts of the Hiraṇyagarbha (often regarded as the Īśvara or Personal God). It may be difficult for most people to realize the transcendental unity of the inner selves in God. But, even without this higher experience, it is possible to have an awareness of the unity of all mankind at the ordinary empirical level by recognizing the unity of all egos in the Virāṭ.

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[4] George Herber Mead (1863-1931) was one of the few great philosophers America ever produced, although he did not become as famous as his contemporaries William James and John Dewey. His seminal ideas are contained in *Mind, Self and Society*, a posthumous publication compiled from the notes of his lectures taken down by his students.

[5] It is profitable to compare the ideas of Mead and Freud. Both of them divided the self into parts. Mead regarded the self as having two parts: one part spontaneous and creative which he called the active 'I'; the other part conventional and passive, which takes the opinions and attitudes of others into account, and which he called the 'me'. If group life is rigid and restrictive, the 'me' dominates the 'I' and individuality is minimized. But under favourable conditions the 'I' can actively and creatively influence and restructure the social process.

Freud divided the self into id, ego and superego. The superego is roughly equivalent to Mead's 'me'. The id is essentially the biological core of the self that the society tries to, but can never thoroughly, domesticate. The ego is a kind of mediator trying to effect a compromise between the individual's biological needs and the demands of society.

Where Mead saw the possibility of harmony between the 'I' and the 'me', Freud saw the potentialities for conflict among the various parts of the self. cf. Broom and Selznick, *Principles of Sociology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970) pp. 90-92.

[6] Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Charles Scribner Sons, 1958) . p. 11.

Three practical consequences follow from this understanding. First of all, selfishness and arrogance are to be understood as not merely unethical but also irrational. Unselfishness and modesty are to be recognized as a natural mode of life—not as superior virtues to be proud of.

Secondly, the antagonism between self-interest and the interest of the community must go. One should see one's own welfare in the welfare of other people. It is not enough to do good to others as obligatory duty or service. Obligation implies compulsion, and service often hurts the dignity of the receiver and creates counter-obligation. Doing good to others can become a spontaneous act free from the above defects only when one feels that by doing good to others one really does good to oneself. The story of a Jewish rabbi narrated by Martin Buber may serve as an illustration of this point. Rabbi Bunam once stopped in a little town where he intended to spend the sabbath and heard of a very pious and learned man who lived in great poverty. Rabbi Bunam

> invited himself to the man's house as his sabbath guest, had furnishings, dishes and food taken to the empty house and even managed to persuade him to accept suitable clothing. When the sabbath was over, Rabbi Bunam, in parting, presented his host with a considerable sum of money. But the latter refused to accept it, saying that he had already received more than enough.
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> 'The rest', said Rabbi Bunam, 'I did not give *you*, but *myself*, in order to heal the wound of pity which your wretchedness dealt me; only now can I fulfil the commandment of charity. That is why it is written: "Thou shalt surely give him and thy heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him." He who cannot endure the sight of poverty must allay it until the grievance of his heart is overcome; only then can he really give to his fellow man.'[7]

When we meet a poverty-stricken man, the compassion and sorrow we feel is *our* problem, *not his*. We can solve this, *our,* problem in two ways: either we may heal the wound in our conscience by doing something to relieve the man of his hardship, or we may cover the wound with some explanation or ignore it altogether. If we follow the former method we will appear to be unselfish and, if we follow latter, we will appear to be selfish. Both are, however, self-centred attitudes. At first sight, this statement may sound like psychological quibbling. But that it is not so will become clear when we consider the phenomenon of jealousy. The person who feels compassion for the poor may feel jealous of his more successful colleague or richer neighbour.[8] On the other hand, another person who may not be kind to the poor may not be envious of more successful people either. In many social workers, once the initial urge for service gets satisfied, kindness and love give way to ambition, jealousy or hatred. This shows that, in unawakened people, compassion and jealousy are the obverse and reverse of the same self-centred attitude.

What, then, is the right attitude or criterion necessary for social service? An attitude of feeling joy at the welfare of others. Compassion and kindness are negative attitudes and it is easy to feel them. But to seek the welfare of others in a positive way or to feel joy at the success and happiness of others is much more difficult. To have such an attitude one should have the capacity for sharing in larger life. This is the attitude that the mother has towards her child. It is not compassion or pity at the helplessness of her baby that motivates a mother but sharing in her child's life. The mother sees her own welfare as inseparable from the child's. An ordinary mother's sharing is, however, limited. Great men and women are those who are capable of taking a larger share of universal life. This takes us to the third practical consequence referred to above.

Love and kindness to be true and unalloyed must be universal, that is, directed towards all people; such an attitude comes only through sharing in larger life. This sharing is the result of inner growth or expansion from the limited ego-awareness to the awareness of the collective Self or Virāṭ. A seemingly trifling anecdote may serve to illustrate this principle of sharing. One day somebody brought the Holy Mother, Śrī Sāradā Devī, two choice mangoes. Mother wanted Sister Devamātā, an American nun who was on a visit to her, to take those mangoes. Knowing that the mangoes were the last of the season, Sister Devamātā refused to accept them, saying that it would make her happier if the Holy Mother had them. Mother's immediate response was in the form of a question: 'Do you think it will

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[7] Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim*: *Later Masters* (New York: Shocken Books, 1948) p. 242.

[8] This often becomes a large-scale social phenomenon. Witness, for instance, the communists' concern for the proletariat and hatred for the bourgeoisie.

give you greater pleasure to have me keep them or give me greater pleasure to have you take them.' The enlightened lady that she was, Devamātā was quick to realize the truth which she expressed in her reply. 'It must give you greater pleasure because you have a larger heart to feel it.' To have larger heart means to have a larger share of universal life. The Holy Mother's love and compassion were not based on ordinary human instincts. They were built on a larger awareness and were an expression of her conscious participation in universal life. Commenting on this simple incident, Sister Devamātā wrote, 'Unbounded was her tender concern for every living thing. No human measure could contain it.'[9]

Dimensions of maturity

We have seen that ego development takes place through interaction with society. Society, however, is a very complex organization with socio-economic, cultural and religious dimensions. It is by making suitable adjustments with this ever-changing, complex phenomenal world that every child has to grow into adulthood. Obviously, ego development is a complex process and must necessarily involve more than one track or dimension. As a matter of fact, it involves several tracks or dimensions. During this growing process the society makes a heavy demand on every person. It is therefore not surprising that few people ever attain maturity in all the dimensions. Few people ever attain full development of their egos. Most people have pockets of immaturity in them. The ego in almost everyone has some of its facets underdeveloped. We now turn to a brief discussion of some of these tracks of ego development.

1. *Autonomy of the self*. Everything that a person has or does has been acquired from the society of which he is a part. The ego is the centre which organizes and gives expression to these powers of the society. To do this efficiently the ego must remain autonomous. This, however, seldom happens. Most people are swept away by the opinions of others, social trends and their own emotions and drives. It is not necessary to be arrogant or rebellious in order to counteract this pull of society. All that is necessary is to have a clear-cut sense of one's own identity or one's own path, and the willpower to stick to it at all costs.

2. *Sense of reality*. According to Freud, the basic instinct in human beings is to seek pleasure and avoid pain, but the ego enables it to operate according to a 'reality principle'. Even without this theory we all learn that we cannot have unlimited pleasure in life. We have a hierarchy of needs and, if we want to have the higher needs fulfilled, we have to reduce or forgo some of the lower pleasures. Moreover, we learn that we cannot grow without participation in collective life and this participation is impossible without sacrificing some of our individual pleasures and preferences.

Above all, we learn that no one can avoid suffering in life. Those who constantly strive to avoid difficulties and suffering will never attain maturity. The maturing individual must learn to take in his stride the many inevitable delays, frustrations, failures, hurts and disappointments of living. Through this process he should develop a high degree of 'stress tolerance'. The work of Hans Selye and others has shown that stress is the chief direct cause of neurosis and psychosomatic diseases. One reason for the alarming increase in the number of mentally disturbed people in modern times is the widespread tendency of young people to seek only comforts shunning discipline and hardship.

3. *Sense of responsibility*. Development of the sense of responsibility constitutes they third track of ego development. A child has little or no social responsibility and knows that it is the responsibility of other people to look after him. If an adult does not outgrow this dependence, he will continue to think that the chief concern of everybody around him should be to take care of him and praise him alone. The sense of responsibility comes with the awareness that the world owes him nothing and he owes everything to the world. The sense of responsibility includes not only a sense of duty, competence and robust pragmatism but an extra quality of the ego known as moral courage. To seek scapegoats for one's own failures is a sign of immaturity. The late U.S. president Harry Truman had a sign on his desk which

[9] Sister Devamata, *Days in an Indian Monastery* (La Crescenta, California: Ananda Ashrama 1927) p. 215.

read, ‘The buck stops here’, thereby making himself solely responsible for his own decisions and actions.

4. *Self-objectification*. Another dimension of maturity is the ability to objectify oneself: to be aware of one’s real motives, weaknesses and capacities, and to see oneself as others see him. The person with insight is able to trace the cause of all his sufferings to himself, but not in a pessimistic way. In other words, he accepts himself. It is only the immature ego that puts on various masks and tries to deceive itself and others.

5. *Evolution of the moral ideal*. Almost every day we have to deal with different types of people and take several small and big decisions. The chief reason why these tasks appear difficult or complicated is our inability to evolve a high moral ideal. This implies three things: acceptance of a clear-cut moral standard, determination to conform one’s life and thoughts to it, and faith in the ultimate triumph of *dharma* or virtue. By moral standard is meant not some moral codes borrowed from books but the formation of a norm out of one’s own life and experiences. One of the difficult aspects of this inner formation is to find the right place for ‘evil’ in the scheme of life. At the phenomenal level evil is at least as real and powerful as the good, and encountering evil is an important step in the maturing process. It is not uncommon to find a young man starting his life as a naive simpleton and, after being deceived and exploited by unscrupulous persons and crooks, ending up as a stony-hearted Shylock or a grouchy old cynic. Moral maturity lies in the ability to integrate evil into one’s view of life without losing one’s essential innocence and goodness.

6. *Development of the parental attitude*. One inseparable aspect of maturity is the parental attitude. In the normal course, this attitude is the result of a slow inner transformation lasting several years. Take the case of a young man who becomes a father at the age of thirty. At first he carries the baby about in his arms, later on walks her or him to the school and, as the girl or boy grows, his fatherhood too grows proportionately so that by the time he reaches fifty he has no difficulty in accepting the twenty-year-old girl or boy as his daughter or son. However, unless he learns to expand this awareness, it may not be possible for him to look upon all twenty-year-olds as his sons and daughters. This problem becomes all the more difficult for celibate people who have no experience of growth in parenthood. Nevertheless, as the Holy Mother Śrī Sāradā Devī demonstrated through her life, it is possible to cultivate the parental attitude as a spiritual discipline.

7. *Self-integration*. As William James pointed out, ‘The baby assailed by eyes, ears, nose, skin and entrails at once, feels it all as one great blooming, buzzing confusion.’ This confusion increases as the child grows for, apart from the increase in inputs like sense-experience and information, he has to deal with various inner forces like instinctual drives and emotions. Later still, as he enters into direct personal relationships with the people around him and plays different roles in social life, his ego develops different dimensions. One of the difficult problems in the maturing process is to unite all these divergent dimensions of personality into a well-integrated self.

A related problem is to weave one’s experiences into a meaningful, goal-oriented pattern which we may call the ‘philosophy of life’. Everyone—be he a farmer, barber, soldier, professor or monk—who has succeeded in this task is a philosopher in his own right. According to the eminent American psychologist Gordon Allport, the development of a personal philosophy of life is a hall mark of a mature personality. He writes: ‘Finally, a mature personality always has some unifying philosophy of life, although not necessarily religious in type, nor articulated in words, nor entirely complete. But without the direction and coherence supplied by some dominant integrative pattern, any life seems fragmented and aimless.’[10]

8. *Openness to universal life*. All the seven traits of maturity so far discussed become socially beneficial only when the ego communicates freely with Universal Life. In fact this openness to

[10] Gordon W. Allport, *The Individual and His Religion* (New York: MacMillam & Co., 1950).

Universal Life is alone enough for the full development and maturity of the ego which will be brought about by the powerful current of Universal Life.

An immature, unawakened ego may be a cause of trouble and division. But as the lives of great religious leaders have shown, an enlightened and mature ego can exert a powerful integrating, strengthening and elevating influence on human society.

PRABUDDHA BHARATA, OCTOBER 1985

INTEGRATION OF THE SELF

(EDITORIAL)

In many parts of India people make a kind of sweetmeat known as *bundi lādu* (or *laddu*). It is usually made of globules of chickpea batter deep-fried, sweetened and pressed into a ball. On some festive occasion Ramu's mother was serving these lādus, which were almost the size of a tennis ball, to the members of her family. When she came to four-year-old Ramu she served him only a quarter of lādu, for she knew that the child would not be able to digest more than that. Ramu was, however, hurt at the 'injustice' done to him and went into a tantrum. His mother tried to pacify him by offering another quarter of the sweet, but the boy spurned it. Knowing that nothing short of a whole ball would satisfy him, his mother searched and found for him a small ladu. It was only one-fourth the normal size, but it was *whole* and Ramu now as pleased as Punch, accepted it with alacrity.

Little children may not have fully developed egos but they have a clear sense of the *whole*. Their view of the world is far more 'wholistic' than that of adults. In fact the main trend of development during childhood is towards the attainment of wholeness and fullness. But various social and cultural factors intervene and disturb this trend so much so that, by the time adolescence is reached, the personality will have undergone considerable disintegration, distortion and disorientation to life and reality.

Living as we do in a complex and rapidly changing world, and caught in a web of relationships, we are called upon to deal with a variety of objects, persons and events in everyday life. However, it is not the complexity of external situations that is the real problem—these are not as complex as we take them to be—the real problem is the disorganized condition of our inner life. Says Abraham Maslow. 'My general thesis is that many of the communication difficulties between persons are the byproducts of communication barriers within the person.'[1]

How can there be communication barriers *within* us? If there are several selves within, each with its own language or each working out of harmony with the others, there can arise communication difficulties within us. Such a situation indeed exists within us. The term 'self' here means a unit of life with its own closed-circuit organization, function and centre of control. The human personality is an aggregate of several such more or less autonomous units functioning as one organismic whole under the supervision of a transcendent principle of consciousness known as the Ātman.

Three models of the self

The nature of this organization was studied in depth by the ancient Indian sages. Their studies led to the development of several structural-functional models of the self. One of these models is based on the view that human life consists of three *avasthās* or states known as the *jāgrat* or waking, *svapna* or dreaming and *suşupti* or deep sleep, and that the self pulsates through these states. Accordingly, the self is also said to have three states known as *viśva, taijasa* and *prājña* which correspond respectively to the three states of life. Beyond these three states there is the transcendental fourth state in which the self remains as the unconditioned Ātman. Each state of the self is not only different but is almost wholly unrelated to the other states in time and space. Of these only the first state (*viśva*) is under conscious control. This view has been presented with great clarity in the *Māṇdukya Upaniṣad*.

Another model of the self is based on the view that human personality has five levels each with a different function, and each representing. a particular dimension of the self. The five functions are: 1. providing a physical basis to life, 2. all vital movements which interconnect the body and the mind, 3. all mental activities pertaining to knowledge of the external world, 4. self-awareness, 5. self-

[1] Abraham H. Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (New York: Esalen/penguin, 1982) p. 149.

transcendence and experience of supreme bliss. According to the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* each of these functions is carried out by a different self. This means that the human personality consists of five different selves which the Upaniṣad has named, in the above order: *annamaya-ātman, prāṇamaya-ātman, manomaya-ātman, vijñānamaya-ātman* and *ānandamaya-ātman*. Though these selves are all different, they are (unlike the waking, dreaming and deep-sleep selves) related to one another. Indeed, they represent five dimensions of one whole Self.

This view of the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* underwent two modifications in later centuries after the rise of Advaita as a distinct school of philosophy. Śrī Śamkara in his commentary on the above Upaniṣad replaced the concept of five *ātmās* with the concept of five *kośas* or sheaths, which are products of *avidyā* or ignorance and act as the limiting adjuncts of one non-dual Self known as Brahman. According to him, the upaniṣadic text speaks of the five sheaths because 'its real intention is to reveal Brahman as the indwelling Self by following a process of eliminating the five sheaths, just as rice is extracted from the grain called *kodrava* that has many husks.[2] Though the word *kośa* is found in several Upaniṣads, including the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* ,[3] the introduction of the concept of five *kośas* in this particular context seems to be Śamkara's own contribution. The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* speaks not of five sheaths but of five selves, and this difference is quite significant. The dynamism, near autonomy and uniqueness of the body, Prāṇa, mind and other levels of personality are more clearly expressed by the word *ātman* than by the term kośa. The Taittirīya concept of five selves underwent a second modification when attempts were made to correlate it with the earlier concept of three *avasthās* or states. Sadānanda's *Vedānta-sāra,* for instance, identifies *viśva* with the consciousness permeating the sheath of *anna, taijasa* with the consciousness permeating the next three higher sheaths (*prāṇa, manas* and *vijñāna*) and *prajñā* with the consciousness permeating the sheath of *ānanda*.

The two models of self discussed above are Vedāntic. A third model was developed by the Tantras. This is based on the principle that consciousness (*cit*) itself is power (*śakti*) and that the whole created universe is a manifestation of cosmic *cit-śakti*. The individual aspect of *cit-śakti* is known as *kuṇdalinī*. This means that *kuṇdalinī* itself is the *jīvātman* or individual Self. When the Tantras speak of *kuṇdalinī* rising through six *cakras* or whorls, what is implied is that the unfolding of the Self takes place in six stages. The six *cakras* are *mūlādhāra, svādhiṣţhāna, maṇipūraka, anāhata, viśuddha* and *ājñā*. At each *cakra* the individual Self manifests a different dimension. Above the six *cakras* is another centre known as the *sahasrāra*. It is not called a *cakra* because there the individual Self ceases to exist as a separate entity, having become one with the Supreme Self. Every *cakra*, represented as a lotus, is the mystic symbol of one dimension of the *jīvātman*.

It may be mentioned here that during the last thirty years an immense amount of knowledge, about the self has accumulated in the West, partly through, inter-disciplinary research and partly through the introduction of various concepts from Zen, Tibetan Buddhism, Kabalah and other religious traditions. As a result there now exists a bewildering profusion or confusion of technical terms, names, ideas and conceptual frameworks. Recently Ken Wilber has made a bold attempt to restore order by classifying the various conceptions regarding the self under some broad levels, each with its own sub-levels. Wilber's five main levels of the self are: 1. Pleromatic-uroboric 2. Typhonic 3. Egoic 4. Centauric 5. Transpersonal. In spite of their unfamiliar tone, these terms correspond respectively to the *annamaya* and the other *kośas* of Vedānta.[4]

Need for integration of personality

We may adopt any one of these models of the self as a means of understanding ourselves. But what is really important is to be aware that the human personality is much more complex than what we usually take it to be and that many of the problems of life come from the disharmony among the different parts of personality. Our success in life—secular as well as spiritual—depends to a great extent

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[2] {Sanskrit} Śamkara, Commentary on *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.2.1.

[3] {Sanskrit} *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 1.4.1.

[4] Ken Wilber, *The Atman Project* (Wheaton, Illionois: Quest Book/Theosophical Publishing House, 1982).

on the degree of integration of personality we attain. In order to convince ourselves of the need for integration of personality it is necessary to know the problems created by inadequate integration.

The most obvious signs of inadequate integration may be found in the gross physical body which the Upaniṣad calls *annamaya-ātman*. The human body is not meant only for physical enjoyment, as the bodies of animals are, but for the realization of the higher values of life. As Kālidāsa has put it, 'For the practice of Dharma, the body is the primary means.'[5] When this truth is forgotten and the body is either abused for pleasure or neglected for austerity, it becomes sick. In order to function normally the body needs the maintenance of a stable internal environment known as homeostasis which is the result of a perfect coordination of the workings and responses of all the parts of the body. Illness may be regarded as a disturbance in this homeostatic balance. This shows how important physical or physiological integration is. A sick body works out of harmony with the rest of the personality.

The next higher self is the *prāṇamaya-ātman*. Prāṇa is the vital force responsible for all life-activities, but, as a self, its chief function is to mediate between the mind and the physical body. On the one hand it regulates physiological activities and, on the other hand, it provides the power for the rise of thoughts in the mind. Most of the instinctual drives originate here, and it is quite possible that Freud's concept of 'id' corresponds to the Prāṇic self.[6] When Prāṇa works disharmoniously, it produces troubles in the body and the mind. Many of the emotional problems, especially lust and anger, are caused by the Prāṇic self working out of harmony with the rest of the personality.

The mind, though deriving its motive power from Prāṇa, has its own independent functions like the classification and coordination of knowledge. Its most fundamental activity is abstraction-symbolization. A dog reacts to food or an enemy only when it can sense them and, if they are not present, it cannot 'think' about them. In order to think, the mind must be able to separate an experience from its object of experience and to represent the experience in the form of a sign or symbol; the first process is called abstraction and the second process is called symbolization. Only the human mind has these two powers which are behind every kind of language and art. The mind of man has been so much conditioned by language that he cannot think without words. Abstraction and symbolization are often carried so far that thoughts may have no relation with the actual world. This kind of conceptual delusion takes place when one reads stories, fables and novels or watches a film show. It may also occur even at other times in the course of everyday life and activity and, when it happens, the mind loses its integrity.

The mind is not a mechanical contrivance like a camera or a tape-recorder. It is a living entity, a person, self, the *manomaya-ātman*. This is what is popularly known as the ego. Desires, emotions and ideas and the roles played in society split mental life into different streams, and the ego identifies itself with each of them. This often gives rise to the impression that there are several egos in the same person. The ego of a teacher changes into father-ego and husband-ego when he reaches home and into citizen-ego when he reads the newspaper. Some psychologists therefore refer to the ego as 'ego-system'.

Apart from this, as Dr. Jung has shown, the ego reveals certain antipodal characteristics. Most, if not all, children reveal several bad traits which do not show up when they become adults. What happens to those undesirable childhood traits? According to Dr. Jung, they are not destroyed but owing to the influence of parents, teachers and other socializing agencies, they are repressed or pushed down into the unconscious where they continue to exist unnoticed. In their place the adult puts on several masks of good traits, that is, he pretends to be more virtuous than he really is. The repressed bad traits

[5] {Sanskrit} Kālidāsa, *Kumārasambhavam* 5.33.

[6] It also corresponds to what Jung called 'psychoid', a term originally applied by the German neo-vitalist Hans Driesch to the psychic factor which guides the growth of organisms. As Jung has shown, every human instinct has a physical pole and a mental pole.

which work underground constitute the 'shadow' and the masks of virtue constitute the 'persona'. The ego may be taken as the sum total of these two.[7]

Normally a person refuses to accept his hidden lower self, the 'shadow'. He feels ashamed of it and may even hate it. In some people this self-hatred changes into hatred for other people. In some others self-hatred makes them punish themselves in various ways or seek various avenues of escapism.

Furthermore, the 'shadow' represents the past. If the past is bad, we want to forget it and 'turn over a new leaf'; if the past is glorious, we want to forget the present and live in a world of sweet memories. Both these ways create divisions in the personality. If we want to keep our personalities integrated, the only way is to integrate the past, good or bad, into the present.

The ego shows several other types of polarity like 'anima' (the feminine element in male ego) and 'animus' (the masculine element in female ego). The integration of all these diverse traits and parts into a clearly defined, mature, fully functioning ego is one of the most important and difficult tasks in human development.

Higher than the mind is the sheath of intuition known as *vijñāna,* also called *buddhi, dhī, hṛd* or *hṛdayam* (heart). One important point to note here is that what is called 'conscious' mind by western psychologists (corresponding to *manas*) is considered unconscious or sub-conscious in Indian psychology. *Buddhi* is the real conscious mind, according to Vedānta. Think of a river flowing at night with a lamp-post on its bank: except for a patch of light on it the river is not visible. The *buddhi* is like that patch of light; it alone has self-awareness; whereas, like the rest of the river, the ordinary mind is in a subconscious or unconscious state.[8] In most people the *buddhi* is in an unawakened condition and the door to it remains closed. Hence they remain without Self-awareness most of the time, working mechanically, carried away by the impetuosity of instinctual drives, impulses, emotions, fancies and fantasies.

The *buddhi* is also the seat of will. Will is of two types: true and false. 'What is popularly known as will is nothing but the organization of some of the higher impulses and drives towards the achievement of success in some worldly enterprise. The false will, which the *Gītā* calls *rājasikā dhṛti,* is the power of the ego. True will is the power of the inner Self and comes into operation only after higher spiritual awakening. The *Gītā* calls it *sāttvikā dhṛti*[9]. In the higher stages of meditation all lower impulses and emotions disappear and the mind becomes still like a luminous block of glass; then the true will alone operates, silently leading the soul Godward. When a person comes down from that higher state the true will continues to guide his actions which, as a result, becomes fully self-directed. The true will alone is free and it alone can effect the integration of the whole personality.

The self associated with the *buddhi* is the *vijñānamaya-ātman,* which is the *pratyagātman* or inner Self. It is the real core of our individuality and, as long as it remains unrealized, as long as we identify ourselves with the false self or ego, we remain estranged from our true being. This inner estrangement, called self-alienation, is one of the main causes of loss of identity and of meaning in modern life.

The *vijñānamaya* self is the highest limit of individuality. Beyond it the self assumes a cosmic dimension. It is at this level that the self experiences the unity of all beings in the Supreme Self, Paramātman. When this higher dimension is not realized, we feel alienated from our fellowbeings.

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[7] It should be pointed out here that this is only a generalized statement. For Jung the ego is the centre of the conscious. Since the 'shadow' is in the unconscious, it does not belong to the ego. cf. Frieda Fordham, *An Introduction to Jung's Psychology* (Harmonds-worth: Pelican/Penguin Books, 1973).

[8] Each self or *kośa* (including the physical body) has its own mode of consciousness. So here unconsciousness means lack of self-awareness.

[9] {Sanskrit} *Gītā* 18:33.

This higher universal Self is called *ānandamaya-ātman* because it is the fountainhead of supreme bliss. Every lower self or *kośa* has its own type of joy, but all these fleeting joys are only particles trickling down from the Blissful Self.

Our discussion thus far has shown that though each segment of personality (self or *kośa*) has its own more or less autonomous functions, laws and needs, each is in fact a system consisting of different parts or aspects and therefore needs to be thoroughly integrated. Apart from this integration of each self, the personality as a whole needs integration. There are some basic principles involved in these processes of integration and to these we turn now.

Principles of integration

Integration is a principle which has assumed considerable importance in modern life. Manufacturing, bureaucracy, communication, transport, research and similar fields now consist of systems and subsystems of such sophistication and complexity that the orchestration of their functions has itself become an independent field employing advanced techniques of recording, monitoring and feedback. Modern factories, business establishments, administrative offices and research institutions are now being modelled on the principles of integration found in living organisms. As a result there has arisen a whole new set of disciplines like cybernetics, bionics, systems engineering, information theory and a new philosophy known as General Systems Philosophy.

They represent the application of the principles of integration in the external world. They have enabled the developed countries of the West to attain great material prosperity and military strength but have not enabled the people to lead an integrated life and enjoy lasting peace and fulfilment. The struggle to control the external world only increases man's dependence on and bondage to the perishable objects of the world. Man can never attain true happiness and freedom without achieving full mastery over himself. The ancient law-giver Manu has expressed this truth in a famous dictum: 'All dependence is misery, all self-control is happiness.'[10] Organization in the external world does not necessarily lead to organization in the inner world. The principles of integration of personality are to be discovered in one's own consciousness.

The term 'integration of personality' was popularized by the Swiss psychiatrist Carl G. Jung. By 'integration' he meant the establishment of a close rapport between the unconscious and conscious strata of mind (which he called the 'psyche'). In an integrated personality the unconscious, instead of acting as an enemy, as Freud believed it did, supports and co-operates with the conscious. Freud recognized three kinds of self: the id (the personification of instinctual drives), the ego (the controller) and the super-ego (the moral critic or conscience). But according to Jung most people do not have, other than the psyche and the ego, a well-developed 'self'. In his view the 'self' is an autonomous principle that comes into existence through a process of inner transformation and growth which he called 'individuation'. The 'self' is a centre that comes into existence at the borderland between the conscious and the unconscious integrating both. Only mature individuals succeed, after prolonged inner struggle, in developing the 'self' and they alone can be said to have integrated personalities. It cannot be denied that Jung has provided some valuable insights into the working of the unconscious and that his theory of integration has highlighted some unexplored aspects of mental life. Nevertheless, as a technique of holistic living, his theory of integration is quite inadequate and incomplete because it deals with only one or two dimensions of personality.

It is only the Vedāntic view of the self that takes into consideration all the dimensions of personality and has, with the help of yoga psychology, made a depth analysis of all of them and worked out a comprehensive scheme for the complete integration of personality. We have already discussed the Vedāntic view of personality as consisting of five selves or sheaths. It is remarkable that the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* while giving a detailed description of the five selves employs the imagery of a bird. Each self is depicted as a bird with a head (*śirah*), two wings (*pakṣah*), a body (*ātmā*) and a tail (*puccham*). This

[10] {Sanskrit} *Manu-Smṛti,* 4.160.

metaphor is very suggestive, for the delicately balanced, well-adapted and very mobile avian body clearly demonstrates some of the basic principles of morphological integration. If any part of the bird has a defect, it will not be able to fly. Similarly, if there is a defect in any part of the *kośa,* the self pertaining to it will not function properly. The suggestion of flying is appropriate, for just as a bird flies in the air, so does each self or *kośa* operate in a vaster field of infinite Reality known as Brahman. Corresponding to each *kośa* or dimension of individual self, there is a cosmic level of Brahman or infinite Self.

What are the Vedāntic principles of integration of personality? These are found scattered in the Upaniṣads and books on yoga. Some of the important ones among these principles are reformulated below.

1. Every *kośa* or self has a specific function in the overall harmony of the whole personality; it can function properly only when its basic needs are satisfied; and for the fulfilment of these basic needs each *kośa* must communicate freely with its cosmic universe. Food, water, air etc. needed for the body come from the physical universe of which it is a part. The individual Prāṇa is dependent on cosmic Prāṇa. The different kinds of knowledge needed for the development of the human mind come from the cosmic mind or *mahat*.

2. Each *kośa* or self has its own mode of expression or language. The genetic code may be taken as the language of protoplasm that constitutes the physical body. The cells of a tissue communicate among themselves and with those of other tissues through messages coded in messenger-RNA, neuro-transmitters, hormones, etc. The Prāṇic self has its own language. Other than nutritional deficiencies and diseases connected with the biochemistry of the body, many of the troubles of the body are caused by the malfunctioning of Prāṇa. By learning the language of Prāṇa each person should understand the workings of his own body.

3. Each *kośa* or self has its own centre of control. By manipulating this centre it is possible to regulate the working of that *kośa*. Western scientists regard the brain as the control centre for the physical body, whereas yogis regard it only as a relay station. The primary concern of yogis is Prāṇa. According to them, two main functions of Prāṇa, metabolism and reproduction, are controlled by the *Mūlādhāra* and *svādhiṣṭhāna* centres.[11] The next higher *cakra* known as *manipūraka* controls the production of speech; it is the centre which regulates the flow of *prāṇa* into the mind and the rise of verbal ideas in the mind.

4. The overall harmony of personality is effected through hierarchical control. Each *kośa*-self can to some extent be controlled by the next higher *kośa*-self. The physiological activities of the body can be regulated by controlling Prāṇa, Prāṇa can be controlled by the mind and mind can be controlled by the *buddhi*.[12] Being the seat of the true will, the *buddhi* alone can act as the super-control room for the integration of the whole personality. The master-key to unlock the mysteries of lower *kośas* is hidden in the *buddhi* or *vijñānamaya-kośa*.

5. The integration of the whole personality can be effected only through an integrative principle of life which is common to all the *kośas*. One such principle is *cit* or consciousness which permeates every part of the personality. The integration of personality calls for a total transformation of consciousness.

6. Lastly, integration of personality needs the holistic perception of a common goal or ideal. Very often we accept a high goal or ideal, say God-realization, after reading about it in books. Such a borrowed idea remains somewhere in the higher regions of the mind but the body, Prāṇa and lower mind, instead of accepting it, seek their own goals. This is the reason why spiritual aspirants find that a

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[11] It may be of interest to note here that at an early stage in embryonic life known as the *gastrula*, the area known as *dorsal lip* or *primitive knot* (which corresponds to the base of the spine in the fully grown baby) is the centre for all important vital activities.

[12] This hierarchical control is suggested in the *Gītā* 3.42, 43 and through the chariot metaphor in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 1.3.10.

major portion of their everyday life has nothing to do with the spiritual ideal they have accepted. The true ideal capable of effecting the integration of the whole personality emerges out of the depths of one's consciousness in the fullness of time. Such an ideal by its sheer power draws every part of the personality to it.

Two ways of integrating personality

We have to consider now how the integration of total personality can actually be achieved. We have seen that integration can be effected only on the basis of an integrative principle of life common to all the *kośa-selves*. Actually there are two such principles: Prāṇa and *cit* or consciousness. Accordingly, there are two ways of achieving integration: by controlling Prāṇa and by transforming consciousness.

The first path is followed by Haṭhayogis and some Tāntrik sects. Their aim is to gain full control over Prāṇa through a graded course of disciplines. Prāṇa is not restricted to the *prāṇamaya-kośa* alone; it is the fundamental life-force operating in all the *kośas*. The Haṭhayogis begin with the gross form of Prāṇa in the physical body and try to bring it under control through physical means such as postures (*āsana*), the six purificatory exercises called *ṣaṭkarma* (which include the washing of the alimentary canal from both ends and other similar processes), and some other practices known as *mudrā* and *bandha*. Next they try to integrate the Prāṇic self through Prāṇāyāma or breath-regulation. After this the practice of mental concentration known as Rāja-Yoga is taken up. Even here the basic idea is to raise Prāṇa to the level of self-awareness which is what the awakening of *kuṇdalinī* really means.

The drawback of this approach is that it is a piecemeal attempt at integration. Many of those who follow it get stalled at the body level and thus fail to achieve full integration. Moreover, some of these physical exercises make the body so sensitive that any deviation from the rigid routine may cause serious physical or mental disorders.

The second way of integration, based on the transformation of consciousness, is followed in the Vedānta. In the Upaniṣads Prāṇa is recognized as *satya*, the truth of life, but consciousness is recognized as a still higher principle, *satyasya satyam*, the 'Truth of truth'.[13] In this path integration of personality is attempted from the topmost level, that is, from the Ātman. The essential nature of Ātman is Self-awareness. The lower three *kośa*-selves are controlled by Prāṇa and belong to the realm of the unconscious. That is why they often work out of harmony with the higher dimensions of the Self. This condition can be remedied and the lower selves integrated by extending the awareness of the Ātman into them. No part of the personality should be left in the darkness of the unconscious; the entire personality should be illumined by the light of the Ātman. This is the holistic method of personality integration taught in Vedānta.

The extension of the light of the Ātman into lower sheaths may be done in two ways: either through self-effort or through self-surrender to God. The first method is stressed in Jñāna-mārga, the path of knowledge. Here consciousness is regarded as non-dual and the individual Self as one with the Infinite Self. The aspirant tries to maintain this awareness at all times, even while engaged in work, by holding on to his inner Self. By the constant practice of this interior witnessing, self-awareness percolates into every *kośa*-self and brings about on overall harmony.

The other method, based on self-surrender, is stressed in the path of Bhakti. Here the Supreme Self is regarded as the Inner controller (*antaryāmin*) indwelling the individual Self. The lower levels of

[13] *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.1.20.

personality work out of harmony only because they have not been surrendered fully to the control of the Divine. Each *kośa*-self must be opened fully to the Divine; this is what surrender really means. It can be done through prayer, worship or meditation. When it is properly done, divine light and power pour into every part of the personality purifying, integrating and transforming it. Such a transfigured individual feels that every life-activity in him is being impelled by the power of the Divine. The nature of this transformed awareness has been beautifully expressed by Dhruva in the *Bhāgavatam*. When the little boy had practised meditation for some time he realized the Lord as his Inner Controller. Then he opened his eyes and beheld the corporeal form of the Lord. But the first words that he uttered were an expression of his inner experience. He said: 'Salutations to you, omnipotent Lord, who, having entered my inner being, enliven through your will-power my dormant thoughts, my arms, feet, sense organs and Prāṇa.'[14]

The integrating plural 'we'

So far our discussion has centred on the individual. The integration of personality as an independent, fully functioning, creative individual is known as 'autonomy'. This autonomy is vitally necessary for every person to retain his identity, to actualize his creative potentialities to the fullest extent, to face the adverse conditions of life and to be self-reliant. But the sense of self-sufficiency that it may induce is a false one, for every human being is dependent on society for his basic needs. Nor is autonomy complete in itself, for the human self has a cosmic dimension which man shares with his fellow-men and, unless integration with one's fellow-men is achieved, an individual's life will remain incomplete. Above all, the unity of life manifests itself in the human heart as love and unselfishness which can find fulfilment only through integration with universal life.

This kind of social integration, sharing in universal life, is called 'homonomy'.[15] Autonomy and homonomy are complementary to each other. It is not possible to attain homonomy without attaining autonomy. People who lack integrated personalities cannot attain real integration with society. They will either surrender themselves to the herd and blindly follow other people or else will become a burden upon society.

From this it follows as a corollary that love for oneself and love for others are not mutually exclusive. Those who hate themselves can never truly love others. A higher form of love for oneself is necessary in order to understand the meaning of love for other people. False selflessness based on guilt and self-hatred is as unhealthy as selfishness. Selfishness and false unselfishness are found only in immature and unintegrated personalities. In truly mature and integrated people, especially saints and sages, a holy love for oneself and pure love for others are found united into a single striving with an undivided goal.

Whereas the selfish or egoistic person is obsessed with 'I' and gets alienated from other people, the falsely unselfish escapist is obsessed with 'they' and gets alienated from himself. But the fully mature and awakened individual synthesizes the 'I' and the 'they' into a universal 'we' and frees himself from all forms of obsession and alienation. Negative terms such as 'unselfish' and 'selfless' can no longer be applied to him, for his whole outlook on life has become positive. Whatever he has or does is for the good of all people, and by his mere living he becomes a blessing to his fellow-men. Such a fully integrated, liberated individual who lives for the good of the world has been described in the *Gītā* as *sthitaprajña*.

The synthesis of 'I' and 'they' into universal 'we' is one of the highest points in the integration of personality. It is the result of a radical transformation of consciousness. Only through a transformation of consciousness can total integration of personality be achieved.

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[14] {Sanskrit} *Bhāgavatam* 4.9.6.

[15] The term 'homonomy' was original1y used by A. Angyal. See, *Farther Reaches of Human Nature* p. 157.

PRABUDDHA BHARATA, NOVEMBER 1985

IMAGAES OF THE EGO

(EDITORIAL)

The ego—not to be got rid of but to be transformed

Buddha renounced his kingdom and the pleasures of life with a view to finding a solution to the existential problem of sorrow. After six years of struggle when enlightenment dawned upon him under the Bodhi tree he discovered that the ego was the root cause of all suffering. He then exclaimed:

> Many a House of Life
> Hath held me—seeking ever Him who wrought
> These prisons of the senses, sorrow-fraught;
> Sore was my ceaseless strife!
> But now,
> Thou Builder of this Tabernacle—Thou!
> I know Thee! Never shalt Thou build again
> These walls of pain,
> Nor raise the roof-tree of deceits nor lay
> Fresh rafters on the clay;
> Broken Thy house is; and the ridge-pole split!
> Delusion fashioned it!
> Safe pass I thence—deliverance to obtain.[1]

This passage, in its original and interpreted versions, has inspired countless people to shun and despise the ego as the greatest evil. Here the ego is spoken of as the 'builder of the tabernacle' and the 'ridgepole of delusion'. But who within Buddha spoke these words? The ego itself! Not the Supreme Self, for the Buddha did not believe in It. Here in this passage it is Buddha's own ego that is addressing itself. Buddha's ego could thus address itself because it had attained the highest degree of maturity, strength and illumination, and was therefore ready to transcend itself. Having realized the vastness of Nirvāṇa, his ego had no more use for a tenement or a ridge-pole. If without attaining full maturity, strength, purity and enlightenment, an ordinary person tries to transcend ego-consciousness or pretend to be egoless, his effort is likely to become a kind of spiritual harakiri.

There is nothing more maligned, more abused, more tortured than the human ego. And yet all the great achievements of mankind have been achieved by the human ego. To use a Shakespearean phrase, the ego is 'more sinned against than sinning'. Before trying to eliminate the ego it is necessary to understand ego's real value and function. A strong, mature, well-integrated and purified ego alone can overcome lower impulses, withstand the temptations of wealth and fame, achieve great things in life, serve other people without attachment, and attain spiritual illumination. A person endowed with such an ego is an asset to the family, community or society to which he belongs.

It is the weak, ignorant, immature and impure ego that prompts people to take to evil ways to deceive and slander innocent people, to exploit the poor and the helpless, and sow seeds of suffering and discord wherever they go. This was pointed out by Swami Vivekānanda long ago. In the course of a lecture delivered in London, Swamiji said:

Weakness is the one cause of suffering. We become miserable because we are weak. We lie, steal, kill and commit other crimes because we are weak. We suffer because we are weak. We die because we are weak. Where there is nothing to weaken us, there is no death nor sorrow.[2]

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[1] Sir Edwin Arnold, *The Light of Asia* (London: Kegan Paul, 1943) p. 115.

[2] *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekānanda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1976) Vol. 2, p. 198.

Even to pray to God and depend on God the ego needs tremendous strength. A weak-minded person will not pray; instead, he will simply sit brooding over his past or blaming other people for his misfortunes. About this latter tendency Swami Vivekānanda said

> Those that blame others—and alas! the number of them is increasing every day—are generally miserable, with helpless brains; they have brought themselves to that pass through their own mistakes and blame others, but this does not alter their position... This attempt to throw the blame upon others only weakens them the more. Therefore, blame none for your own faults, stand upon your own feet and take the whole responsibility upon yourselves.[3]

This 'standing upon your own feet' need not or should not prevent us from depending on God. As a matter of fact, only a strong ego can open itself fully to divine grace. It is a mistake to think that prayer, worship and self-surrender are meant only for weak-minded people or that to practise these devotional exercises one has to look upon oneself as weak and worthless. To call forth intensity in prayer, single-mindedness in worship, sincerity in self-surrender and steadfastness in love for an unseen Being, the ego needs an iron will and a spirit of heroism.

What is really evil or troublesome is not the ego but egoism. The difference between the ego and egoism was pointed out on more than one previous occasion.[4] The ego as the source of 'I'-consciousness forms the basis of human individuality, coordinating all mental activities and interpreting all human relationships. Egoism is the attachment of the ego to the objects of the senses and its desperate attempt to protect itself. It manifests itself as vanity and arrogance, jealousy and cruelty, selfishness and greed. These wrong attitudes towards life represent certain wrong modes of consciousness. By transforming our consciousness it is possible to get rid of egoism. This is what 'purification of mind' usually means. When egoism is to some extent eliminated, it will be possible to deal with the ego directly.

Whatever be the spiritual path we follow, our primary effort should be to eliminate egoism on the one hand, and to understand the ego and develop its inherent capacities, on the other. In other words, our proximate aim should be to transform the ego, not to transcend it.

Yoga and the transformation of ego

Transformation of the ego is only one aspect of the total transformation of personality. As pointed out last month, the human personality consists of different *kośas* or sheaths in the form of the physical body. Prāṇa, mind, intellect and the causal sheath—all held together by the Ātman in the form of consciousness which permeates them all. The Upaniṣadic sages gave primacy to consciousness and identified it with the Supreme Reality. *Prajñānam-brahma,* 'Brahman *is* consciousness', is one of the greatest metaphysical truths ever discovered. Śamkarācārya made this concept more explicit by stating that consciousness alone is real and non-dual whereas all physical and mental objects are unreal and serve only as limiting adjuncts.

The doctrine that physical and mental objects are limiting adjuncts has gained a new significance in modern times with Einstein's formulation of 'limiting velocity' and Heisenberg's 'principle of indeterminacy'. That man's present state of existence is one of limitation has been stated with great clarity by the Cambridge philosopher C.D. Broad as follows:

> ….we should do well to consider much more seriously than we have hitherto been inclined to do the type of theory which Bergson put forward in connection with memory and sense perception. The suggestion is that the function of the brain and nervous system and sense organs is in the main *eliminative* and not productive. Each person is at each moment capable of remembering all that has ever happened to him and of perceiving everything that is happening everywhere in the universe. The function of the brain and nervous system is to protect us from being overwhelmed and confused by this mass of largely useless and irrelevant knowledge, by shutting out most of what we should otherwise perceive or remember at any moment and leaving only that very small and special selection which is likely to he practically useful.

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[3] *Complete Works* Vol. 2, p. 225.

[4] See, Editorials in *Prabuddha Bhārata* June, July, August, 1985.

Aldous Huxley, who has quoted the above statement in one of his books, comments upon it: 'According to such a theory, each one of us is potentially Mind at Large.'[5] Huxley's 'Mind at Large' corresponds to the Prakṛti of Sāmkhya and Patañjali's system. Vedānta replaces it with the doctrine of 'Self at Large' or Brahman which is non-dual consciousness. The ego as a limiting adjunct has a useful function: it serves as a conduit for funnelling infinite consciousness into the mind and the body.

The doctrine that the essential nature of man is consciousness, that the ego is only a conduit for it and that the body and mind are only limiting adjuncts has immense practical significance. In the first place, it shows that man can bring about great changes in his personality by manipulating his consciousness. By transforming his consciousness he can eliminate selfishness, arrogance and hatred from his mind and become selfless, modest and loving. A person may have lived an immoral or sorrowful life, yet he can erase all its bad effects, overcome his limitations and create a new glorious life by transforming his consciousness. Even certain types of illness can be got rid of through this process. It was this understanding that led to the development of yoga in India.

What is yoga? The fundamental principle involved in it is the transformation of consciousness. Yoga is an integrative system of self-directed disciplines by which transformation of consciousness is accelerated. In this transformation the ego plays a central role. All life is, as the *Gītā* says, a manifestation of Divine Yoga[6] and all changes are brought about by the power of the Divine. The function of the ego is to serve as a conduit for the flow of divine Power. But, owing to ignorance, the ego in most people develops a possessive attitude towards the objects of the world and blocks or restricts the flow of energy into the personality. As a result, though a natural transformation of consciousness is taking place in all people, it is slow, haphazard and mostly unconscious. Yoga is a conscious, goal-oriented effort to accelerate the tempo of this transformation. What ordinary life achieves in scores of years yoga accomplishes in a few years. If ordinary life is evolution, yoga is revolution. For this inner revolution all that is necessary is the opening of the ego more fully and freely to the Supreme Self. The transformation of the ego is thus a key factor in yoga. All the four well-known yogas—Karma-Yoga, Rāja-Yoga, Bhakti yoga and Jñāna-Yoga—have for their central aim the transformation of ego consciousness.

Forms of ego knowledge

This shows how important it is to have true knowledge of one's ego. Yet, few people care to have it. Most people would like to know more about the world and the affairs of other people than about themselves. In one of his last letters the great Swiss psychiatrist Dr. Jung wrote: 'The human mind, still an adolescent boy, will sacrifice everything for a new gadget but will carefully refrain from a look into himself.'[7] We often forget that our understanding of other people and our ability to help them depend to a great extent on our knowledge of ourselves. A teacher with self-knowledge is capable of helping a larger number of students far more effectively than a teacher without self-knowledge is. An executive with self-knowledge deals with his clients and subordinates far more efficiently than an executive with little self-knowledge does. A social worker with self-knowledge can render better service to a larger number of people than a social worker with poor self-knowledge can. Much of the misunderstanding and many of the quarrels in everyday life have their origin in inadequate self-knowledge.

The ego, however, is so complex and puts on so many masks that it is difficult to understand its true nature and mode of operation. Nevertheless, the ego reveals itself, directly or indirectly, in various forms. Western psychologists have paid considerable attention to this subject in recent years, and have developed several concepts to represent these forms of ego knowledge.[8] Some of these concepts deserve our consideration here.

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[5] Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception* (New York; Harper and Row, 1945) p. 23.

[6] {Sanskrit} *Gītā* 9.5; 11.8.

[7] *C. G. Jung, Letters,* Ed. Gerhard Adler (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975) Vol. 2, P. 609.

[8] For a comprehensive treatment of the subject see, Jane Loevinger, *Ego Development* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1976). Also, Ken Wilber *The Atman Project* (Wheaton., Illinois: Theosophical Publishing House, 1982).

1. *Self-image*. The newborn infant has no ego worth mentioning. His earliest perception of himself, according to psychologists, is in the form of a knowledge of the boundary lines of its body. This awareness of the physical self is known as *body image*; it forms the foundation of human personality.[9]

The growing infant learns the distinction between the me and the not-me. Since he is treated as an 'object' by all others, it takes time for him to regard himself as the subject, to refer to himself as 'I' or *ego*. With the development of 'I' he has to own responsibility for his feelings and actions. As the child's experience broadens, his self-identity comes to include things outside of himself—parents, toys, clothes, playmates and so on. His identification with these external objects gives rise to the feeling of 'mine' or *egoism.*

The feeling of 'I' and 'mine'—ego and egoism—gets further strengthened when the growing child finds himself forced to play an increasing number of roles in society. In the playing of roles he is judged, accepted or rejected by the other members of his society. These social reactions get internalized and build the child's image of himself. A child does not have the power of introspection to understand his real nature and worth; therefore he judges himself by the opinions and attitudes of other people. The resultant picture of himself that takes shape at the back of his mind is known as *self-image*. Once this kind of self-image is formed in childhood, it is difficult to change it in adult life.

This early self-image may be repressed, that is, pushed down into the unconscious, but from that hidden position it goes on influencing a person's behaviour, attitudes and opinions all through his life without his being aware of this fact. Children who have a happy childhood develop healthy, positive, self-images. But children whose lives are filled with sufferings and inhibitions develop unhealthy, distorted self-images which will exert a negative influence in adult life even after they have achieved academic brilliance or professional eminence. New self-images are formed in adult life but the childhood self-image continues its work until it is understood and integrated into the adult self-image through introspection or spiritual illumination.

2. *Ego-ideal*. Whatever be his self-image, every boy has some idea of what he can 'become' (a doctor, engineer, musician or politician) and his capacity to attain it. This perception of one's possibilities is known as the *ego-ideal*. It is an expression of the soul's aspiration and elan. Sometimes under the influence of parents, or by identification with somebody whom he admires, a young person may adopt a wrong ideal—as for instance, a boy with no real aptitude for engineering may be forced to become an engineer. In such a case, the ideal remains outside of him, it does not get integrated into his personality; in other words, it does not become his ego-ideal.

To have a realistic ego-ideal is one thing but to realize it in life is quite a different thing. Not all people succeed in realizing their aspirations. An unfulfilled ego-ideal is one of the major causes of frustration and meaninglessness in adult life. On the other hand, as child psychologist P. BIos has shown, the ego-ideal may propel some people toward the incredible feats of creativity, heroism, sacrifice and selflessness. One dies for one's ego-ideal rather than let it die. It is the most uncompromising influence on the conduct of the mature individual: its position is always unequivocal.'[10]

It should be noted here that whereas the influence of self-image is a subliminal or unrecognized one, that of ego-ideal is a more or less conscious one. A person's self-image indicates what he *thinks* he is, while his ego-ideal indicates what he *thinks* he can be. If the self-image is a positive one it will be a great help in the realization of the ego-ideal; if the sell-image is a negative one it will be a great obstacle.

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[9] The body image goes on changing but persists all through life. It is neglected in childhood, emerges in adolescence as an object of great attraction, and becomes a source of anxiety in old age.

[10] Quoted in *Atman Project* p. 139.

3. *The masked self*. A person may not really be what he *thinks* he is. Self-image does not represent the total personality. There are several elements of human character which are the products of painful or shameful experiences of the past. These are pushed so deep into the unconscious that they do not find a place in a person's self-image. These repressed and unintegrated human traits constitute what Jung had termed the *shadow*. The shadow makes its appearance in dreams, fantasies, strange desires and in other ways. To hide the shadow or to hide even the self-image, the ego puts on several masks and pretends to be somebody else. These social masks constitute what Jung has termed the *persona*. The masked self is the ego as it appears to others. The nature of the mask depends upon the role that the ego has to play in society.

Modern society teaches the ego to put on several masks. The more sophisticated the society is, the more hypocritical life becomes. The hypocrisies of modem life are so well-known, and psychologists and fiction writers have exposed them so thoroughly, that there is no need to enumerate them here. For our purpose it is enough to note here that through hypocrisy it may be possible to attain success in worldly life but not in spiritual life. One cannot approach God wearing masks.

4. *Dream-self*. It is an important psychological fact that the unconscious is the source of power and creativity and everything that is pushed into it will seek expression with greater force. Dreams provide one of the commonest ways for the expression of repressed desires and images. This is the view held by Freudian psychologists who do not recognize the existence of dream-self as a distinct entity. According to them, dream life is important in so far as it provides vital clues to the workings of the unconscious and the lower self.

In India the phenomenon of dreaming received considerable attention even during the period of the Upaniṣads. The Upaniṣadic sages recognized the dream-self as a distinct entity or dimension. Moreover they looked upon it as providing vital clues to the existence of the higher Self and the superconscious.

Whether we accept the view of Western psychologists or the view of Indian sages—they evidently complement each other—the important point to note is that the dream-self remains a total stranger to the waking-state ego. It may even work contrary to the interests of the ego. This state of affairs may be all right in worldly life, but not in spiritual life. As long as dream life remains impure or wholly unconnected to one's higher aspirations, spiritual life will remain incomplete. It is, however, possible to contact the dream-self in the depths of meditation and, since the dream-self is only a part of our total consciousness, by transforming the total consciousness it is possible to transform, to re-educate and integrate the dream-self. This is one of the most difficult aspects of yoga.

5. *Fantasy-self*. We have seen that dreaming provides one outlet for the expression of man's repressed wishes and aspirations. But dreaming is beyond the control of the ego. The ego cannot have the dream that it likes and avoid the one that it does not like. It therefore 'invents' another kind of dreaming during the waking state in which it can mentally create or become whatever it likes. In this state, which is known by such terms as day-dream, reverie, fantasy and wool-gathering, the ego changes into a new idealized self which may be called the fantasy-self.

The fantasy-self may have absolutely no similarity to the ago or no relation to the real world. A poor man becomes in his day-dreams the owner of a five-star hotel and a fleet of cars, a weak-bodied person becomes a great sportsman or military general, a man without much talent becomes a great orator, musician or scientist. The famous American humorist James Thurber has given an interesting account of this self-fantasizing process in his short story *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*.

Why do people day-dream? Given the proper environment, every individual would try to fulfil all his basic needs and higher aspirations in the real world itself. But most individuals find that the environment they are in is unfavourable and many of their desires and ideals cannot be realized in real life. Under such circumstances, says Karen Homey, one of the most original thinkers among psychoanalysts after Freud and Jung,

there is only one way in which he can seem to fulfil them, and seem to fulfil all of them at one stroke: through imagination. Gradually and unconsciously, the imagination sets to work and creates in his mind an idealized image of himself. In this process he endows himself with unlimited powers and with exalted faculties; he becomes a hero, a genius, a supreme lover, a saint, a god.

Self-idealization always entails a general self-glorification, and thereby gives the individual the much-needed feeling of significance and of superiority over others. But it is by no means a blind self-aggrandizement. Each person builds up his personal idealized image from the materials of his own special experiences, his earlier fantasies, his particular needs, and also his given faculties. If it were not for the personal character of the image, he would not attain a feeling of identity and unity. He idealizes, to begin with, his particular 'solution' of his basic conflict: compliance becomes goodness, love becomes saintliness, aggressiveness becomes strength....

Eventually the individual may come to identify himself with his idealized, integrated image. Then it does not remain a visionary image which he secretly cherishes; imperceptibly he *becomes* this image: the idealized image becomes an idealized *self*.[11]

Karen Homey has here described how man converts an idealized image into his own self. Day-dreaming is not an idle sport indulged in to while the time away, for many people snatch precious minutes from their busy schedule of work or study in order to day-dream—so compelling is its urge. The person who gives himself up to reverie is generally aware of its unreal and futile nature, and yet he clings to it because, as Homey says, it provides a 'solution not only for a particular conflict but one that implicitly promises to satisfy all the inner needs that have arisen in an individual at a given time. Moreover, it promises not only a riddance from his painful and unbearable feelings but in addition an ultimately mysterious fulfilment of himself and his life.'[12]

The primary cause behind day-dreaming is not the desire to escape from conflicts but a dim awareness of the supreme glory of one's true Self, the Ātman. This awareness produces in every civilized human being an inherent urge to attain perfection, infinite knowledge, power, boundless love and bliss. Karen Homey calls this the 'search for glory'. Since the fulfilment of such an urge is not possible in ordinary worldly life, the urge finds expression in all kinds of daydreams.

The problem posed by day-dreaming is not merely the waste of time but the loss of elan. As Homey puts it, 'The energies driving towards self-realization are shifted to the aim of actualizing the idealized self.' However, several psychologists including Horney have shown that the fantasy-self exerts some influence on the normal life of the person. It may induce the person to convert his everyday life into a drive for perfection. In that event the fantasy-self and the ego come closer and closer together, though their fusion rarely takes place.

6. *Ideal Self or spirit-image*. Day-dreaming is more or less an unconscious or subliminal activity and the fantasy-self is alienated from the real ego. A different, fully conscious process takes place in spiritual life. Since the real higher Self or Ātman cannot be so easily realized, the spiritual aspirant may consciously create an ideal Self or spirit-image endowed with utter purity, beauty, love, knowledge, light. The ego is made to identify itself with this spirit-image so much so that this process does not create self-alienation in the aspirant.

Creation of the spirit-image has an important and scripturally sanctioned place in the path of Bhakti. Here, depending upon his attitude towards the Deity, the aspirant thinks of himself as a servant, friend, child or bride. This process is often put into practice so thoroughly and with such intensity that the spirit-image in due course swallows up the entire ego and becomes the actual Self of the aspirant. Śrī Rāmakrishna demonstrated in his life the validity of this process to an astonishingly high degree. When he strove to realize Śrī Rāma, he thought of himself as Hanumān and his whole personality changed into that of Hanumān. When he strove to realize Śrī Kṛṣṇa his whole personality changed into that of Rādhā. Those who follow the path of Jñāna often create another type of spirit-image. They visualize the Self as a sphere of light or as a luminous lotus.

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[11] Karen Homey, 'The Search for Glory' in *The Self—Explorations in Personal Growth*, Ed. Clark Moustakas (New York: Harper & Bros., 1956) p. 223. This article also forms a part of Karen Horney's own book *Neurosis and Human Growth* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1950).

[12] *ibid*.

Spirit-image has tremendous transforming power, and much of the success in spiritual life depends upon making the ego conform to it.

In the context we may mention that, according to Patañjali, an advanced yogi can create out of his purified ego several new selves called *nirmāṇa-citta* which are like the fantasy-self but are as real as the phenomenal world and are operated by the powerful will of the yogi. On this point Swami Vivekānanda says:

> With a view to exhausting their Karma quickly, yogis create *Kāya-vyūha,* or groups of bodies, in which to work it out. For all these bodies they create minds from the egoism. These are called 'created minds' in contradistinction to their original minds.[13]

7. *The witness-Self*. Behind all the selves mentioned above and observing their activities there stands the unchanging, ever-present, silent witness-Self which is none else than the *pratyagātman,* the immanent Self. It is not the ego but the ultimate source and goal of the ego.

Integration of the selves

The ego cannot be seen as the physical body is, nor can it be photographed. Other than the experience of 'I' our understanding of the ego comes to us indirectly through the different images of the self described above. With so many selves or surrogate selves operating in the same person it is not surprising that many people feel alienation and disharmony within themselves, lack of intensity of aspiration, and inability to persevere in any goal-oriented pursuit with undivided dedication. This problem assumes greater importance in spiritual life. Without effecting some measure of integration of these selves it is not possible to make much headway in spiritual life.

All these selves are only projections of one undivided consciousness. Therefore, it is by transforming our consciousness that integration can be achieved. Transformation of consciousness is mediated through several agents like work, meditation, ideals, love and the spiritual guide. How this takes place will be the subject of our study next month.

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[13] Swami Vivekānanda, *Rāja-Yoga,* Part II, commentary on *Yoga-Sūtra* 4.4.

PRABUDDHA BHARATA, DECEMBER 1985

TRANSFORMATION OF EGO-CONSCIOUSNESS

(EDITORIAL)

Finding equilibrium in life

The French chemist Berthollet (1749-1822) who accompanied Napoleon in his expedition to Egypt notice sizeable deposits of washing soda (sodium carbonate) on the banks of some Egyptian lakes. They had evidently been produced by the action of saline water on the limestone (calcium carbonate) bordering the lakes. This surprised him because under normal conditions it is the reverse reaction—sodium carbonate and calcium chloride reacting to produce sodium chloride and calcium carbonate—that usually takes place. Berthollet concluded that the heavy concentration of sodium chloride in the lake caused by the excessive evaporation of water had driven the reaction in the opposite direction. This discovery led to the formulation of an important law of Mass Action. This law states that the direction and rate of a chemical reaction depend in part on the masses of the reacting substances.

A law similar to the Law of Mass Action seems to operate in the mental universe. A person's character is the sum total of the good and bad tendencies (*samskāras*) produced in him by his past experiences, and the nature and direction of his behaviour depend upon the way these good and bad tendencies react with each other. If the good tendencies are greater in number and strength, his actions will be good, moral, spiritual; and even if the evil tendencies in him get the upper hand once in a while, the good tendencies by their sheer mass will state overcome them and put him back on and drive him along the track of virtue. The famous statement in the *Gītā* that 'By the previous practice itself he is carried forward in spite of his limitations',[1] though it refers to effort made in the previous birth, is equally true of everyone's present life also.

The important implication of the above fact is that, human life derives its dynamism primarily from an inner source inherent in its being. In every human being there are, apart from basic biological impulses, the urge for creativity, the urge to know, to love and to seek higher forms of fulfilment. At the same time various external forces, chiefly socio-economic and cultural, are acting upon man. One of the important functions of the ego is to regulate the expression of inner urges in accordance with the external forces and keep the human personality in a state of equilibrium.

The primary struggle in human life—in fact, in all forms of life—is to attain a state of dynamic equilibrium. Life belongs to the category of what scientists call 'steady state' but is not an unregulated uniform flux. It is a state of constantly self-renewing equilibrium. Without the maintenance of a more or less stable internal environment (a principle known as homeostasis) the physiological functions of the body cannot be carried out. In the same way, the mind can function creatively only if there is a stable psychological environment. Consciously or unconsciously every person tries to maintain the constancy of his psychological environment by making necessary adjustments in his relationships, emotions, beliefs, conceptions, attitudes and actions. When one state of equilibrium attained thus through much effort gets disturbed, he makes fresh adjustments and tries to attain another state of equilibrium.

For instance, a young man has to find a new equilibrium in life when he marries. This equilibrium becomes inadequate when he realizes that the work he had been doing is dissatisfying or that his marriage is a misalliance, or when he has to face critical situations brought about by his own folly or by somebody's maleficence. He then finds that he is unable to function creatively or find peace of mind until he finds a new equilibrium in his life. Failure to find a proper equilibrium in life may lead to various psychological problems like depression, alienation and neurosis.

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[1] {Sanskrit} *Gītā* 6.44.

How can a person find equilibrium in life? At first he may try to find it in the external world—through change of job, through divorce, by trying to manipulate the people around him or by trying to forget his problems through alcoholism, reading of fiction or reckless living. As a matter of fact, the time and energy of many people are mostly spent in seeking external means of attaining equilibrium in life. But sooner or later they find that their efforts are fruitless. For one thing, external factors cannot be manipulated beyond a certain limit. It is of course true that some of our economic and health problems can be solved by external means, but even in such instances it is often found that every problem solved has given rise to two more. Many of the developed countries of the West have succeeded in eradicating dire poverty, gross ignorance and exploitation of man, but these changes have also directly or indirectly intensified the existential sufferings of the people there. Problems such as anxiety, loneliness, moral laxity and meaninglessness are indications of the inability of people to find a suitable equilibrium in life. The external world cannot really solve the basic problems of life; it can only create them.

Need for transformation of consciousness

True equilibrium in life can be attained only by transforming one's ego-consciousness. As mentioned earlier, it is the ego that keeps up the equilibrium, between inner urges and outer influences. This it does by developing a certain degree of consciousness. When owing to external or internal causes the equilibrium is upset, the ego can establish a new equilibrium only by transforming its consciousness. Attitudes, faith, relationships and behaviour pattern together constitute ego-consciousness, with 'I' as its core. Transformation of the ego means transformation of this whole constellation of consciousness. When difficult situations arise and we find we are unable to cope with them, we should know that the time has come for us to take stock of our present attitudes, needs, relationships and other aspects of the ego and to bring about a total transformation of our ego-consciousness.

The attainment of a state of equilibrium in life does not mean the elimination of all difficulties, which are bound to crop up as long as life lasts. What it really means is a state of consciousness in which we understand our problems clearly, are able to deal with them effectively, and at the same time succeed in actualizing our creative and spiritual potentialities satisfactorily. This important principle was put in a very simple way by Śrī Rāmakrishna in one of the precepts that he gave Holy Mother Śrī Sāradā Devī: 'Whatever is appropriate at a particular time, do that at that time; whatever is appropriate in dealing with a particular person, deal with him in that manner; whatever is appropriate at a particular place, do that there.'[2] It is difficult to think of a better rule of thumb for human conduct than this simple advice, and yet, no grown-up person need be told that, for all its simplicity, it is an extremely difficult principle to be put into practice. Nor was this precept intended merely to teach how to cultivate pleasing manners or how to avoid fauxpas and ineptitude in social life. What was implied in the teaching was the cultivation of a larger awareness, an expanded ego-consciousness, which could take on all situations with equanimity allowing one freedom to maintain unbroken God consciousness under all circumstances.

It is not enough to attain some sort of equilibrium in life and lead a well-adjusted social life. The chief purpose of attaining equilibrium should be to free us from tension, worry, distraction and waste of energy, caused by a disharmonious life so that we may turn inward at all times to the real source of knowledge, strength and peace deep within us. Transformation of ego-consciousness is an important and unavoidable aspect of spiritual life. During the early stages of spiritual life a certain degree of purity and transformation of the ego is necessary in order to acquire even a glimpse of inner Light. After that, as the soul progresses in spiritual life, the ego has to undergo corresponding changes. Every movement towards a higher level in spiritual awareness changes a person's outlook on the world, his relationship with people and his understanding of life. Every genuine spiritual experience produces profound changes in the ego.

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[2] *Jakhan jemon takhan temon,*
Jāhāke jemon tāhāke temon,
jekhāne jemon sekhāne temon.

We have already seen that something like the Law of Mass Action governs the operation of *samskāras*. However, the ego can control the action of *samskāras* to some extent. Moreover, the *samskāras* are an integral part of the ego-system and, when ego-consciousness changes, a wholly new set of *samskāras* gets activated. A person after leading an immoral life for some years may suddenly undergo an inner transformation and, when this happens, he finds new ideas, new urges, new sentiments operating in him. We find this phenomenon in the lives of Girish Chandra Ghosh, Kālīpada Ghosh and a few others who became the disciples of Śrī Rāmakrishna. The Master awakened their dormant spiritual consciousness which totally transformed their egos. When a person undergoes such a transformation, he may find it difficult to believe that he once lived a low life or may wonder how he could do all those bad things. He may still feel the pull of his old tendencies, but the new *samskāras* fight with the old ones and soon put them out of action.

Some of our difficulties in life may have been caused by other people, and some by our own impulses. But the remedy is not to fight with those people or to sit brooding over our weaknesses. The real problem is the state of consciousness the ego is in. When ego-consciousness is transformed, many of our difficulties automatically get solved or appear solvable. At all events, it is unwise to look upon life as a perpetual fight with the people around us or even with ourselves. Human development should be looked upon simply as a movement from one equilibrium state to another through a series of transformations of consciousness. Many of our failures in life are caused by our failure to make this movement.

Transformation and translation

Before proceeding further it is necessary to point out the distinction between two types of changes that take place within us which the transpersonal psychologist Ken Wilber has termed transformation and translation.[3] Transformation is that process by which we move from one equilibrium state to another, whereas translation is the process by which we make adjustments within one equilibrium state.

True knowledge is based on experience. Every person has a certain amount of knowledge derived from his own actual experiences in life. Based on that he develops his own views and concepts of the world. These constitute his own personal language. Even a little child has his own personal language, and goes to school with his own tiny amount of experience and small number of concepts. When he reads a book or is taught by a teacher, he can assimilate the new knowledge only by interpreting it in terms of his own personal language. This interpretation, which is a more or less subliminal operation, is a kind of translation. Through this inner translation one concept is linked to another, and thus the child develops a chain of concepts. Very often the knowledge thus gained may have nothing to do with the actual experiences of life which he has to acquire through other means in the course of growing up. As a child grows, his ego-consciousness undergoes continual transformation, irrespective of the knowledge gained from books.

In adult life much of the knowledge we gain from books and other people is the result of a personal translation process. The new knowledge acquired in this way may increase our understanding of the world we live in, may enable us to appreciate or express beauty and abstract truths or to improve the economic conditions of living (though much of the knowledge so easily available in modern times is nothing but useless rubbish) but it all means one thing: adjustment to the equilibrium or state of harmony with the world, which we have already attained. If we wish to move from a lower equilibrium state to a higher one, we can do it only by transforming our consciousness—and this cannot be done merely by reading books. After reading some books on spiritual life and gaining some clear ideas about God, Ātman, meditation and similar subjects, we sometimes come to the erroneous conclusion that our life has changed much or that we have become holier or more spiritual than other people. If introspection does not dispel this delusion in time, bitter experiences in life will do it soon enough.

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[3] Ken Wilber, *The Atman Project* (Wheaton, Illinois: Theosophical Publishing House, 1982) pp. 40-42.

The psychological *translation* described above affects only our surface consciousness. It does not alter our basic attitudes, emotional responses and behaviour patterns. These are controlled by forces originating in the unconscious and can be changed only by a psychological *transformation*.

Types of transformation of consciousness

Psychological transformation which radically alters our *whole* life is of three types: transformation within the unconscious, transformation of the unconscious into the conscious, and transformation of the conscious into the superconscious.

In the first type, though a person's outlook on life gets completely changed, the actual transformation is restricted wholly to the unconscious. He has no conscious control over it and may not be even aware of it. The transformation of consciousness that takes place spontaneously when a child grows into boyhood or girlhood and thence into adolescence belongs to this type. To it also belongs the sudden 'conversion' that happens in the lives of some people. A rich landlord of Bengal once overheard the little daughter of a washerman telling her father, 'When will you set fire to the *bāsanā*?' She was referring to the dried sheaths of the banana-tree the ash of which was used in laundering. But the word *vāsanā* also means the latent impressions produced in the mind by past experiences. This meaning, struck deep in the heart of the rich man. He at once renounced the world and went to Vrindaban where he spent the rest of his life in austerities and became famous as saint Lala Baba. The lives of several saints like St. Francis of Assissi, Ignatius Loyola, Tulsi Das, Eknath and others in the East and the West were marked by such sudden conversions. In a less spectacular way such sudden conversions occur in the lives of ordinary people also. One such conversion is enough to free a man for ever from attachment to the world and propel him unceasingly to seek a higher goal in life. The exact psychological mechanism which brings about this kind of spontaneous transformation is not fully known.

This kind of transformation need not necessarily be a sudden occurrence; it may be a slow, long-drawn-out process extending over several years. This gradual transformation is quite common and many people seem to be undergoing a gradual inner change which they are not quite aware of.

In the second type of transformation the contents of the unconscious are changed into the conscious. As in the first, here also the main processes take place in the unconscious itself but the conscious mind has access to them. In most cases the transformation is triggered by a conscious effort of the ego.

The unconscious is like a dark underground chamber or cellar with several walls and labyrinths. It is the store-house of all instinctual drives and seeds of desires. The memories of all past experiences are preserved there. Some of these memories are in a dormant state, while others are very active and powerful but are kept pushed down by a psychological mechanism which Freud called 'repression'. The irrational fear of dogs, of being alone, of being in a closed room and similar difficulties that some grown-up people feel may have caused by the repressed memories of unpleasant childhood experiences. Constant feeling of insecurity, anxiety, depression or lack of zest for life may also be the result of conflicts between repressed desires. When repression is removed, the person feels greatly relieved and finds it easy to lead a normal well-adjusted life. Freud's main achievement was that he showed how repression could be removed by extending the conscious into the unconscious with the help of a trained psychologist. Psycho-analysis is based on the fundamental principle that some of the contents of the unconscious can be transformed into conscious experiences. It is generally applied only to deal with abnormal mental conditions.

But even in normal healthy living psychoanalysis can be, or should be, carried out by the individual himself without the help of a psychiatrist. Through this kind of self-psychoanalysis he can learn a great deal about his own mental life, desires, capacities, weaknesses and causes of his failures in life, and channel or sublimate the energy of lower impulses into higher aspiration and creative work. It is important to note that psychoanalysis is not mere passive knowing; rather, it is an active participation in the dynamics of the unconscious and progressive transformation of the unconscious into the conscious.

The key factor in this transformation is the integration of the past into the present. Our present attitude, reactions and behaviour patterns have been determined by our past experiences, especially those of childhood and adolescence. Many of these past experiences may have been unpleasant and we would like to forget all about them. But forgetfulness does not solve any real problem in life. Instead of trying to run away from our difficulties, from our lower desires and impulses, we should face them—'Face the brutes' as Swami Vivekānanda advised us to do. If the *samskāras* of past experience continue to disturb our present life it is necessary to dig them out and deactivate them. Delving into dark catacombs of the unconscious and rediscovering one's own past may be a frightening experience for many people, but is vitally necessary.

It may be asked, what good will come out of this unpleasant task? In the first place, it is necessary for the integration of the personality. The present ego is built upon the forgotten egos of the past and, if they are not integrated properly, there will be divisions in the personality. No instinct or impulse can act without the support of some part of the personality. Lower impulses are all parts of discarded lower selves and, when these selves are absorbed into the present ego, those impulses will cease to trouble us. If you do not know your own past selves which constitute the foundation of your present self, if there are large areas in your mind which are beyond your control, how can you trust yourself, how can other people trust you? If one part of your personality acts contrary to other parts, how can you have peace of mind?

Secondly, integration of the past into the present is necessary to make our lives more real and our attitude towards the world more realistic. Knowledge of ourselves will enable us to understand other people better and this will improve our relationship with them. In order to hide its past the ego often puts on various masks which appear as egotism, vanity, conceit, snobbery and arrogance. Very often humility itself is used as a mask by the ego. The integration of the past will make these masks unnecessary.

Integration of the past may involve repentance, *paścattāpa*. This need not be a morbid act of self-condemnation or brooding over the past. It can be a healthy and positive form of *tapas* or austerity meant to purify one's heart. Śrī Rāmakrishna used to say, 'Tears of repentance wash off the dirt of evil committed in the past.' Christ taught repentance as a condition for receiving divine grace. This doctrine later on became an instrument of self-torture only when it was incorporated into priestcraft and the crude Christian theology of Original Sin. If the distinction between the stainless, uncreated, self-luminous, blissful Ātman and the shadowy images of the ego is understood, and if the person is sufficiently mature and strong in mind, repentance practised as mental *tapas* for a short period can transform ego-consciousness quickly. Enlightened repentance creates such a strong impression in the mind that it prevents us from committing again the mistakes of the past. True repentance is not brooding over the past but preparing for the future.

If one has had a beautiful, happy childhood and adolescence but now finds the presents life miserable, even then the integration of the past into the present is necessary. It will activate once again the springs of power and joy in the unconscious and make them flow into the wilderness of present life. It is said that when as a small boy Siddhārta was once sitting under a rose-apple tree, he experienced ineffable calm and peace. Years later when be renounced the world, he remembered that experience and was eager to recapture it, which of course he did under the Bodhi tree.

Whether a person's past was happy or unhappy, integration of the past into the present is not mere recollection, a passive act of thinking about the past. The past experience has to be relived, the past events are to be reenacted in the depths of the mind, with all the original intensity but with the knowledge, detachment and power that he now possesses. Says Mac Intyre: 'It is a great mistake to suppose that what is involved in the awareness of unconscious motives and in the recovery of hitherto suppressed memories of forgotten incidents and phantasies that analysis provides is simply an intellectual apprehension. The painful emotions and scenes have to be revisited in feeling as well as in thought, and in the whole process there is a strong element of regression. It is because of this that the

patient may first have to get worse in order that later on he may get better.'[4] This is all the more true of self-integration.

The more one's past is rediscovered and accepted, the more the unconscious gets transformed into the conscious. This process becomes easy if one has already experienced what we have described elsewhere as 'ego-awakening'.[5]

We have discussed two types of transformation of consciousness. We now come to the third type: the transformation of the conscious into the superconscious. If the first two types of transformation represent man's struggle to rise from animality to full humanity, the third type represents his struggle to rise from humanity to divinity. Whereas the first two types change only the ego's mode of functioning, the third type changes the very structure of the ego itself. As the conscious gets transformed into the superconscious, the ego itself gets transfigured.

This transformation of the conscious and transfiguration of the ego constitute the primary concern of spiritual life. All spiritual disciplines like prayer, worship, meditation, and even Karma-Yoga, are only different techniques for this change. Every time we pray or meditate intensely our consciousness undergoes a transformation, though the change may be so small that we may not notice it. As this transformation progresses, inner darkness changes into inner Light.

How this transformation takes place and what agents bring it about will be the subject of our discussion next month.

[4] Alasdair Mac Intyre in *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (New York: MacMillan 1967) Vol. 3, p. 250.

[5] See the July 1985 Prabuddha Bhārata editorial.

PRABUDDHA BHARATA, JANUARY 1986

TRANSFORMATION AND TRANSCENDENCE

(EDITORIAL)

Abraham Maslow, a pioneer in humanistic psychology, has narrated a beautiful anecdote about a small American-Indian boy:

> He was about seven or eight years old, and I found by looking very close that he was a kind of rich kid, in a Blackfoot way. He had several horses and cattle in his name, and he owned a medicine bundle of particular value. Someone, a grown-up, turned up who wanted to buy the medicine bundle, which was the most valuable thing that he had. I learned from his father that what little Teddy did when he was made this offer—remember he was only seven years old—was to go into the wilderness by himself to meditate. He went away for about two or three days and nights camping out, thinking for himself. He did not ask his father or his mother for advice, and they didn't tell him anything. He came back and announced his decision[1].

How many grown-ups make decisions, even important decisions which may have far-reaching consequences in their own lives, in the way that little boy did? When confronted with difficulties, most people would rush here and there and try to influence this person or that, failing which they would either go about blaming the world or sit brooding over their misfortunes. What that boy did was to seek a solution to his problem in the depths of consciousness. Being small, his physical and mental capacities were limited, but he knew how to transcend his limitations. Abandoning all external help, alone in the wilderness, he just let the Great Spirit open the door of his heart to the source of infinite knowledge.

Many of the problems of life, especially existential problems like insecurity, unfulfilment, loneliness, meaninglessness, etc. have no lasting solutions in the external world. This, however, is not the only difficulty. A more serious difficulty is that our present state of consciousness is itself too limited and inadequate to solve the basic problems of life. It is this awareness that induces people to practise prayer, worship and meditation. In critical situations some people may achieve a certain degree of transcendence through prayer or meditation and thus succeed in getting inner solace and strength to face the problems of life. But this kind of transcendence is usually a temporary experience and its beneficial effects wear off in a short time.

Is there a way by which man can attain permanent transcendence? The answer given by the saints, sages and mystics of all religions is that man can gain permanent possession of higher levels of transcendence by transforming his consciousness. This is one of the basic presuppositions of yoga, mysticism and spiritual life in general.

Transformation of the conscious into the superconscious

As mentioned in last month's editorial, human consciousness undergoes three types of transformation: transformation within the unconscious, transformation of the contents of the unconscious into the conscious, and transformation of the conscious into the superconscious. The first two types were discussed there and so only the third type need be dealt with here. The first two types really belong to the province of moral life, and it is only the transformation of the conscious into the superconscious that is the chief concern of spiritual life.

The unconscious[2] is the storehouse of impressions (*samskāras*) of past experiences, whereas the conscious deals with the immediate present. The unconscious is also the fountainhead of all good and bad instinctual drives, emotions and creative power. At the beginning of our spiritual life the conscious remains mostly under the control of the unconscious. As a result, we find that our actions and thoughts are to a great extent determined by our inherent tendencies and are going on more or less automatically.

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[1] Abraham H. Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (New York: Esalen/Penguin, 1982) p. 221.

[2] The term 'unconscious' used by western psychologists is somewhat misleading in as much as every part of the mind has its own consciousness. What it really means is absence of self-awareness. 'Subliminal' or 'depth' consciousness would be a more appropriate term than 'unconscious'; nevertheless the latter term is retained for some technical and historical reasons.

In other words, we have very little inner freedom and self-awareness. Much of the early struggle in spiritual life is to free the conscious from the hold of the unconscious.

As the conscious gets freed more and more from the hold of the unconscious, we feel great inner freedom, alertness and tranquillity, our work efficiency increases, and our creative urges find finer modes of expression. Many people remain satisfied with these improvements. They, however, remain conditioned by their present level of awareness. Spiritual life is an attempt to go beyond the limitations of our present state, and this can be achieved only by transforming the conscious mind and illuminating it with superconscious wisdom.

It should be noted here that the conscious and the unconscious are to be regarded not as inert chambers but as functional configurations of the self. They represent two different ways the self functions. If the ego is visualized as a tree, the unconscious will be represented by the roots and the conscious by the trunk. The transformation of the conscious means the transfiguration of the ego—the metamorphosis of the human self into the divine Self. In the Vedas this has been described through the well-known imagery of the two birds. 'Two birds of beautiful plumage, closely related and friendly, cling to the same tree. Of these one eats the fruit of different tastes, while the other looks on without eating. On the same tree (i.e. the body) the lower self grieves, being immersed (in worldliness), deluded and powerless. But when it sees the other (the higher Self), the adorable Lord, and His glory, it becomes free from sorrow.'[3]

It is the light of the higher Self, the Ātman, that transfigures the ego. There is a point of contact between the Ātman and the conscious mind; it is known as the *buddhi* or heart. It acts as the centre of control in spiritual life. The impulsion for the transformation of the conscious must come from this centre, and it will come only if the centre is awakened. We may read books on meditation or listen to the talks of wise men but, unless the spiritual centre starts functioning, our basic awareness will remain unchanged. If the first struggle in spiritual life is to free the conscious from the hold of the unconscious, the next struggle should be to awaken the spiritual centre. Once this higher centre starts functioning, every action and thought will become a means of transforming consciousness. There are, however, several special techniques or processes which accelerate this transformation and some of these are discussed below.

Transforming power of work

We generally tend to look upon work as a means of achieving something in the external world. Rarely do we regard it as a means of transforming consciousness and yet, this transformation is the central aim of Karma-Yoga. The popular notion that Karma-Yoga only means doing good to the world is not wholly correct. For one can do good to the world in various ways and with various motives. Our actions become Karma-Yoga only when they are converted into a technique of transforming consciousness. This also implies that even actions done for one's own good such as eating, dressing, cleaning etc. can be done as Karma-Yoga. The type of work one does is irrelevant to Karma-Yoga; what is important is how the work transforms consciousness.

Here it is necessary to clarify what the word 'karma' really means. In science any movement that involves the expenditure of energy is considered work. It is in this sense that a waterfall, motor car, stomach or lung is said to be 'working'. This, however, is not what 'karma' really means. Work to become karma must have three components: a conscious agent (*kartā*), action which has a moral implication, and an effect (*karmaphala*) which is the fulfilment of a desire (*iṣṭasādhyatā*). The only English word which connotes all these three aspects of karma is perhaps 'labour'. Karma is goal-oriented work done by an agent who owns, or has the obligation to own, moral responsibility for his actions. Śrī Rāmakrishna's parable of the Brahmin who killed a cow but claimed that it was his hand which did the crime and that, therefore, the sin belonged to the presiding deity of the hand, Indra, illustrates the importance of the agent. The agent who owns moral responsibility is the ego.

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[3] *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 3.1.1. The original version occurs in *Ṛg-Veda*. l.164.20.

Why does the ego do karma? To fulfil its needs. Human beings have a hierarchy of needs—physical, physiological, emotional, intellectual, social, creative and spiritual. The lower, needs like food, clothing and shelter are called 'basic needs'. The higher needs are called 'values'.

The hierarchical nature of needs has created a major problem for man: it calls for total fulfilment. The satisfaction of biological needs alone cannot bring complete fulfilment. There is in man the urge to seek and express higher truths, to share love, to create beautiful things and to experience higher forms of happiness. This has been called 'self-actualization'—a term introduced by Goldstein and Karen Homey and popularized by Abraham Maslow. Millions of people in the world are unhappy not because of lack of food and clothing but because of failure in self-actualization. The creative urge in man seems to reach no end. Says Paul Tillich, 'Man's productivity moves from potentiality to actuality in such a way that everything actualized has potentialities for further actualization. This is the basic structure of progress.'[4]

It is with the hope of attaining fulfilment that people do work. But most people find that work brings them only partial fulfilment: it may satisfy some of their physical or social needs, but does not touch the core of their being, the true Self. They find work mostly a horizontal movement: if their aim is to earn money, work enables them to get more and more of it; if their aim is to get fame, work enables them to get more and more of it. Doctors, engineers, social workers and businessmen find that their work only enables them to move further in their own fields, and that this progress takes them away from the core of their true being, alienates them from their true Self. Work can bring higher fulfilment only if it enables them to move vertically upward and realise the higher levels of being and ultimately the true Self.

This upward movement can be effected only through a transformation of consciousness. Can work bring this about? Work produces two types of change: a subjective one and an objective one. It changes the object of work: a carpenter produces changes in a block of wood, a farmer produces changes in the land, a doctor produces changes in the body of the patient, and so on. The objective changes alone are usually noticed and regarded as work. But work has also a subjective effect: it changes the consciousness of the worker. However, this inner change is often so small that it is seldom noticed. Why is it that the inner changes produced by work are so small? Why is it that people find that even after doing work for several years they have derived little inner spiritual benefit from their work? This is one of the fundamental problems of life to which Karma-Yoga addresses itself.

In ordinary work almost the whole of mental energy is directed towards seeking the results of work, and little of it is used consciously to deal with the mind and its problems. Therefore Karma-Yoga prescribes as the first step the freeing of the will from attachment to the fruit of work (*phala-samkalpa tyāga*). That is why Karma-Yoga is often described as *niṣkāma karma*. But the renunciation of the fruit of work is only the first step in Karma-Yoga. The second step is to deal with the ego. The clinging of the ego to the fruit of work is egoism. When egoism is given up, what remains of the ego is simple 'I'-consciousness. This self-awareness can be intensified by cultivating the attitude of an inner witness while one is engaged in work. When the ego is isolated and sufficient self-awareness is built up, one gains tremendous inner strength.

The primary reason why the work that people do does not produce any significant transformation of consciousness is that they lack this inner power born of self-awareness. The ego is not free to deal with itself. There is not enough self-awareness to check the automatisms of the unconscious. There is not enough self-awareness to be focussed upon different parts of the mind and bring about necessary changes there. Another reason is that work is seldom done as an expression of the soul's creativity or, in the words of Swami Vivekānanda, as a manifestation of the potential divinity of the soul. It is the outer objects that draw out work from most people, not the inner creative urge. Many people find it difficult to work without some external stimulus or incentive. It is of course true that people have their own specific fields of creative activity like scientific research, music, painting, dance,

[4] Paul Tillich, *The Courage To Be* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1970) p. 107.

business enterprises, but any work can be done creatively if there is enough dynamism in the soul. Uncreative work done mechanically without sell-direction will not produce any significant transformation in the worker.

When properly done, Karma-Yoga transforms consciousness in different ways. It creates new good *samskāras* which counteract and check the activity of impure *samskāras* already present in the mind. It gives, a higher direction to instinctual energy and sublimates lower instincts into higher sentiments. It enables us to understand the workings of the ego, especially its tentacles of egoism and selfishness which are put forth when the ego is brought into interpersonal relationships through work. The most important way Karma-Yoga brings about transformation is by opening the ego to the stream of universal life. Other than the simple 'I'-consciousness everything else that appears as ego and egoism is the creation of the society of which the person is a part. The very structure of the ego has been determined by the experiences of love and hate and fear gained from childhood. When through Karma-Yoga we free ourselves from this triangle of attitudes and re-establish a new, spiritual relationship with others, it will radically transform ego-consciousness. As a matter of fact, Karma-Yoga brings into existence a new, purified, liberated, spiritual ego open to universal life.

Such a liberated ego alone can offer all work as worship to the Supreme Self who is all-pervading and is the ultimate source of all activity in the universe. This worship is a participation in *virāţ-yajña,* cosmic sacrifice of the Divine which, as the *Gītā* assures us, speedily transforms the conscious into the superconscious.[5]

Transforming power of ideals

Another agent of transformation of ego-consciousness is the ideal. An ideal is a psychological phenomenon which serves as a model of perfection and stimulates goal-oriented activity in the soul. Ideals are of two types, subjective and objective.

A subjective ideal is a model or template the self uses to shape itself. It is the prefiguration of the possibilities of the soul. In the ideal the self finds fulfilled all that it wants to achieve in life, all that it wants to become.

The subjective ideal itself is of two kinds, the ego-ideal and the spirit-image. If you ask a small boy about his future, he will say, 'I want to become so and so.' He may regard his father, elder brother, a bigger boy or a well-known sportsman as the personification of all that he wants to realize in life, and he uses this image to mould his own ego. That becomes his ego-ideal. There is nothing wrong in having such an external ideal to start life with. In fact children need such ideals during the early stages of development, and one of the functions of epics, mythology and fiction is to provide such ego-ideals to dream about. The elimination of such ideals from childhood through rationalization, and overemphasis on scientific knowledge is one of the main causes of rootlessness and vulgarity that characterize many modern youths. About this trend Abraham Maslow writes: 'Every age but ours has had its model, its ideal: the saint, the hero, the knight, the mystic, the gentleman—all these have been given up by our culture. About all we have left is the well-adjusted man without problems, a very pale and doubtful substitute.'[6]

One may accept the image of another person as model for one's own self-development but everyone will sooner or later realize that no external image can serve as a perfect model for oneself. Everyone has to evolve his own ideal of perfection out of his own soul. 'Eric Fromm has shown that, apart from superego which we acquire from our parental environment, there is also an *intrinsic conscience* in us which is based on the unconscious or preconscious perception of our own nature, our destiny, capacities, etc. It insists that we be true to our inner nature.'[7]

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[5] {Sanskrit} *Gītā* 18.46.

[6] Abraham H. Maslow, 'Personality Problems and Personality Growth' in *The Self,* Ed. Clark Moustakas (New York: Harper & Eros, 1956) p. 231.

[7] Maslow, *ibid.,* p. 234.

It is this search for a perfect self-ideal that leads a person ultimately to spiritual life. Spiritual life is based on the belief that man is the spirit, the Ātman, which transcends the ego. This understanding gives rise to the spirit-image by which is meant an idealized concept of the Ātman through which one can establish an intimate relationship with the Deity. One may thus visualize oneself as a child of God, as the mother of the Divine Child, or as an angel or simply as a luminous being. This spirit-image by its very sublimity produces changes in one's consciousness, transforms the ego and finally supplants the ego-ideal.

But a subjective ideal, however high or sublime, is not enough to bring total fulfilment. Most people—though not all—need an objective ideal to adore, to centre their love upon, to bring a sense of completeness or wholeness into their lives. The attitude towards such an objective ideal may be described as, 'I do not want to become one like him, nevertheless I need him as an inseparable part of my life.' A man may have his own ego-ideal, yet he may feel his life incomplete without a wife. Parents need children to complete their sense of parenthood.

Experience, however, teaches us that no ordinary human being, however good and virtuous, can serve as a perfect objective ideal. Ordinary human beings may satisfy some of our emotional needs but not the higher needs of the spirit. Only the great incarnations of God like Kṛṣṇa, Buddha, Christ or some of the archetypal divinities worshipped in Hinduism can really measure up to the lofty standards of the human spirit. That is why they have been universally accepted as perfect objective ideals. Such a universal objective ideal is known as the *iṣṭah-devatā*.

There is a close relationship between one's spirit-image and *iṣṭah-devatā*. A spiritual aspirant should choose as his objective ideal only that divine Being who is in harmony with his own spirit-image and, if possible, one who is in harmony with his ego-ideal.

It is a mistake to look upon the *iṣṭah-devatā* merely as an aid in concentration, *dṛṣṭi-saukaryam*, for even when a person is not practising meditation, the objective ideal continues to influence his thoughts, emotions and actions. There is a lot of difference between meditating on a black dot or gazing at a crystal and meditating on *iṣṭah-devatā*. The former may intensify one's awareness, but the latter transforms the ego. Even if one regards the *iṣṭah-devatā* as a mental projection (as in Tibetan Buddhism) or as an 'archetype' (as the Swiss psychologist Carl G. Jung did), still the objective ideal has a great power of transforming the ego. Dr. Jung has shown that the archetypal symbols of God play two important roles: transformation of consciousness and integration of personality.[8] He regarded the self as a centre with the power to integrate the conscious and the unconscious and believed that, if this centre was not occupied by the Image of God, it would lead to disharmony and mental illness.

If mere symbols can produce such great changes in the mind, how much more powerful must be Reality itself! In Hinduism an *iṣṭah-devatā* is regarded not as a symbol but, as a living manifestation of Divine Reality. According to the Tantras, meditation on a deity automatically purifies the mind. Simply by adoring a divine Personality one's ego gradually gets transformed by absorbing to some extent his divine attributes. A person who has established firmly his *iṣṭah-devatā* in the core of his heart will find his whole personality getting naturally integrated around that centre.

Transforming power of love

Another transforming agent which has a powerful influence on the ego is love. Unlike knowledge which is acquired from outside, love is supposed to be inherent in the soul. Since it is generally assumed that everyone has enough love in him, everyone is expected to love everyone else. This assumption is, however, seldom found corroborated in actual life. A good many human problems and sufferings are caused by inadequate or mis-directed love. This shows that love is not a simple emotional experience. Rather, it is a complex psychological phenomenon associated with different levels of personality. At the level of the body love takes the form of physical attraction or fascination.

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[8] See, *Symbols of Transformation* in *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, Bolligen Series XX (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

At a higher level it becomes an expression of the unity of Prāṇa. An intense form of this love is found in the mother with a newborn baby. At a still higher level love manifests itself as the ego's fellowship with other egos. This is the type of love that characterizes relationships among friends, colleagues and members of societies. At the highest level love is an expression of the oneness of the Ātman with Brahman. This is the transcendent love or *bhakti* which the soul feels for God.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition love is regarded as I-Thou relationship. Even God is the 'wholly Other', an eternal Thou. Love is not a subject-object, I-it, relationship—like the relationship between a carpenter and timber or between a butcher and sheep—but a direct subject-subject relationship. The person who is loved is not treated as an object. Human relationship is a mutual exchange, a dialogue.[9] Clearly, love in Judeo-Christian tradition is conceived as an encounter between two egos. Egos are discrete entities with barriers separating them. The function of love is to overcome these barriers—a negative function.

This dualistic conception of love has two drawbacks. In the first place, it makes love an obligation—not a free and natural attribute of the soul but a duty imposed by God's commandment, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' This view is based on the belief that man by nature is selfish and sinful and that love is a divine gift. Secondly, it regards love for one's own self and love for others as mutually exclusive and contradictory. By treating love for oneself as a sin it encourages self-hatred and taking recourse to selfless service as a form of escape from oneself.

According to Vedānta, love is an expression of the non-dual nature of Reality which is nothing but the Supreme Self of whom all individual selves are parts. Love is not a supernatural gift but a natural attribute of the human soul. There is nothing to separate two selves except ignorance—ignorance of the true nature of the self—and ignorance is removed only by knowledge. When ignorance vanishes, true love already inherent in the soul, manifests itself spontaneously.[10] The natural relationship between human beings is not that of 'I-thou' but of 'we'. It is not necessary to hate oneself or escape from oneself in order to love others. Selfless service is not a special kind of activity but the natural way an enlightened soul acts. What one does for oneself should conduce to the welfare of others and what one does for others should conduce to one's own welfare. In brief, love is the progressive integration of other selves into one's true Self. The only authentic way to love others is to integrate their selves into yours.

An unavoidable step in this integration process is the transformation of ego-consciousness. The limited 'I' must change into an ever-expanding 'we'. In a natural way this takes place to a limited extent in the family, in the friendship circle and in the monastic community, but it usually goes on as an unconscious process interrupted and distorted by instinctual drives like fear, hate and greed. If freed from these lower obstructions, and if cultivated consciously as a spiritual discipline, love becomes one of the most potent means of transforming ego-consciousness. However, love can accomplish this task only if it is genuine. Merely imagining that one has love for others or cultivating polite and pleasing manners can bring about no inner transformation. Genuine, unselfish love is found only in spiritual people.

Meditation and other spiritual techniques

Prayer, worship, Japa, meditation and similar spiritual disciplines form another class of ego transformers. These disciplines, unlike work, ideal and love which operate during the normal course of everyday life, are usually practised at specific times. They produce significant results only when they are practised with great intensity and steadfastness. Their basic principles and effects on consciousness were discussed in these columns on several previous occasions and need not be repeated here.

Encountering the ego

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[9] A forceful expression of this view is found in Martin Buber's famous books, *I and Thou and Between Man and Man*.

[10] cf. 'He sees all beings in the very Self and the Self in all beings, is freed from hatred'. *Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad,* 6.

Though the methods discussed above bring about transformation of ego consciousness, they do not deal with the ego directly. The most effective way of changing the ego is to get hold of it, understand its workings and re-educate it. For this the ego must first of all be encountered in the depths of one's consciousness. Most of the time we are driven into various activities without ever encountering the driver, the ego. We encounter so many people but seldom the ego. The ego has no visible configuration; it is not even a mental image. Nevertheless, its lineaments can be understood by encountering it directly.

This encounter is not a meditation of the ordinary kind which is usually concentration of mind on an object such as a divine image, name or concept. Nor is it thinking about one's past or present actions and reactions. Encountering the ego is a direct communion with oneself. It is an immediate experience which may be best described as a kind of self-revelation. The ego generally puts on several masks, and much of our ordinary understanding of ourselves is based on self-deception. Encountering the ego is to know the ego without its masks. This self-revelation gives us a true picture of ourselves, a deep insight into our present problems and their causes which lie buried in the past.

Lack of self-knowledge is one of the basic causes of our failures and sufferings. It is also the main obstacle to spiritual progress. Many spiritual aspirants do not realize that before they begin their meditation if they spend at least fifteen minutes in encountering the ego, it will greatly improve their concentration and make meditation more realistic. The ego can be truly encountered only in the silence and stillness of the depths of one's consciousness. The daily practice of this kind of interior encounter will soon bring about a great transformation of the ego and one's total awareness.